THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

JUNE, 1956

TWO SHILLINGS

A NEW

GERALD KERSH

STRANGE CARNIVAL

9

new stories

MICHAEL GILBERT · ARTHUR GORDON

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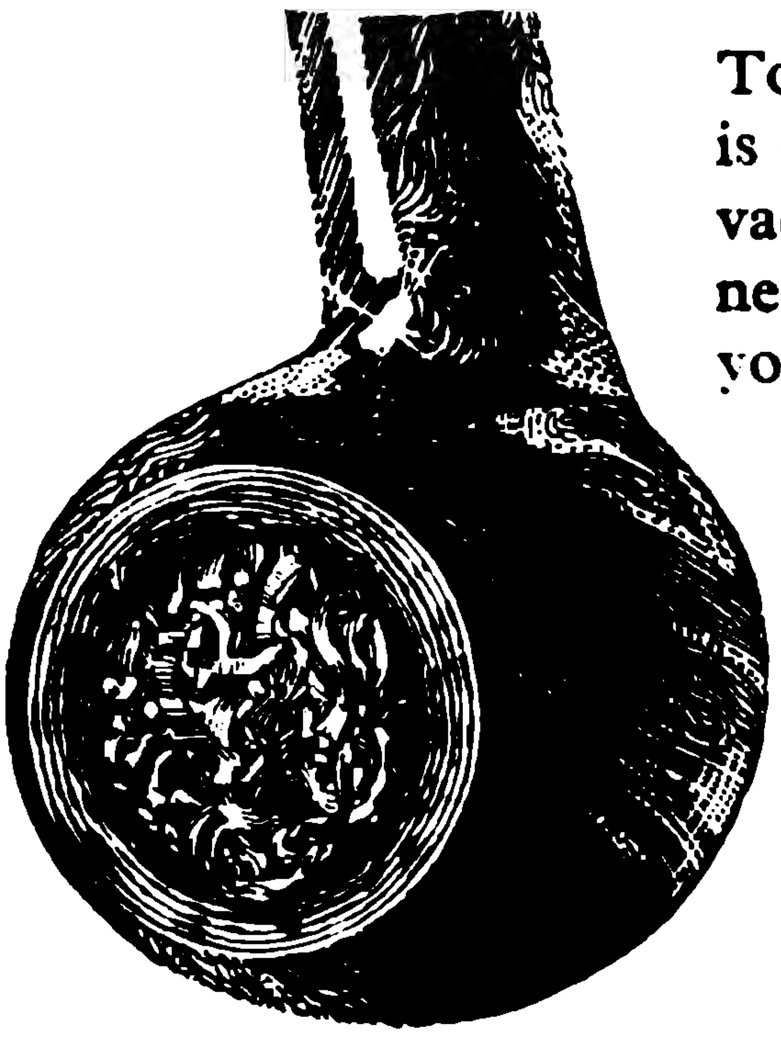

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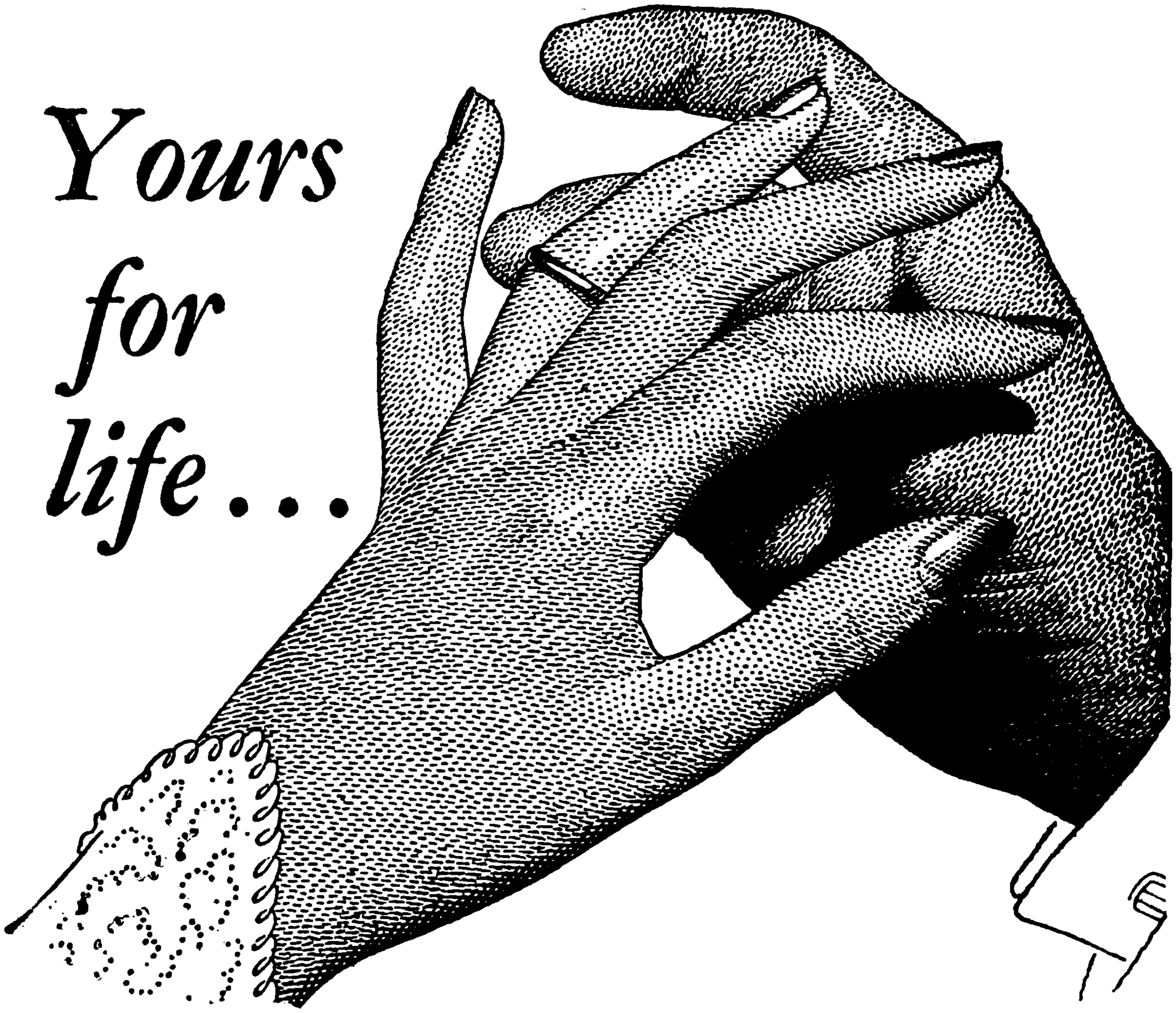

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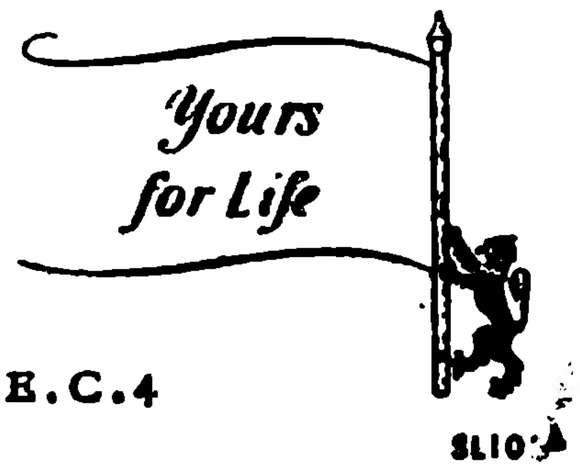

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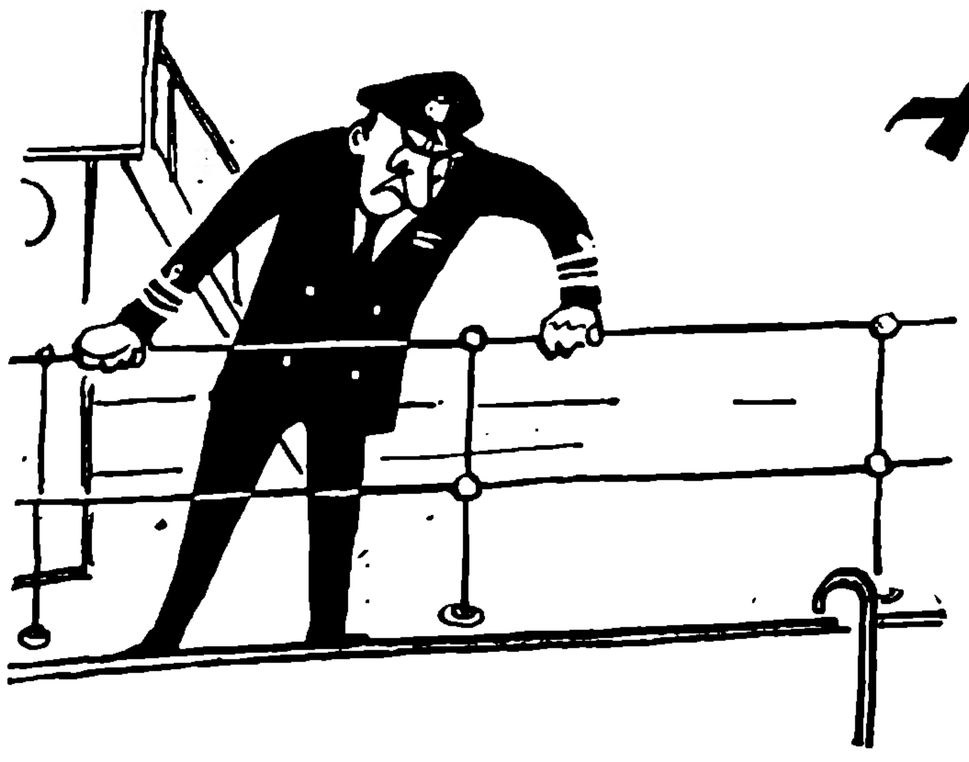


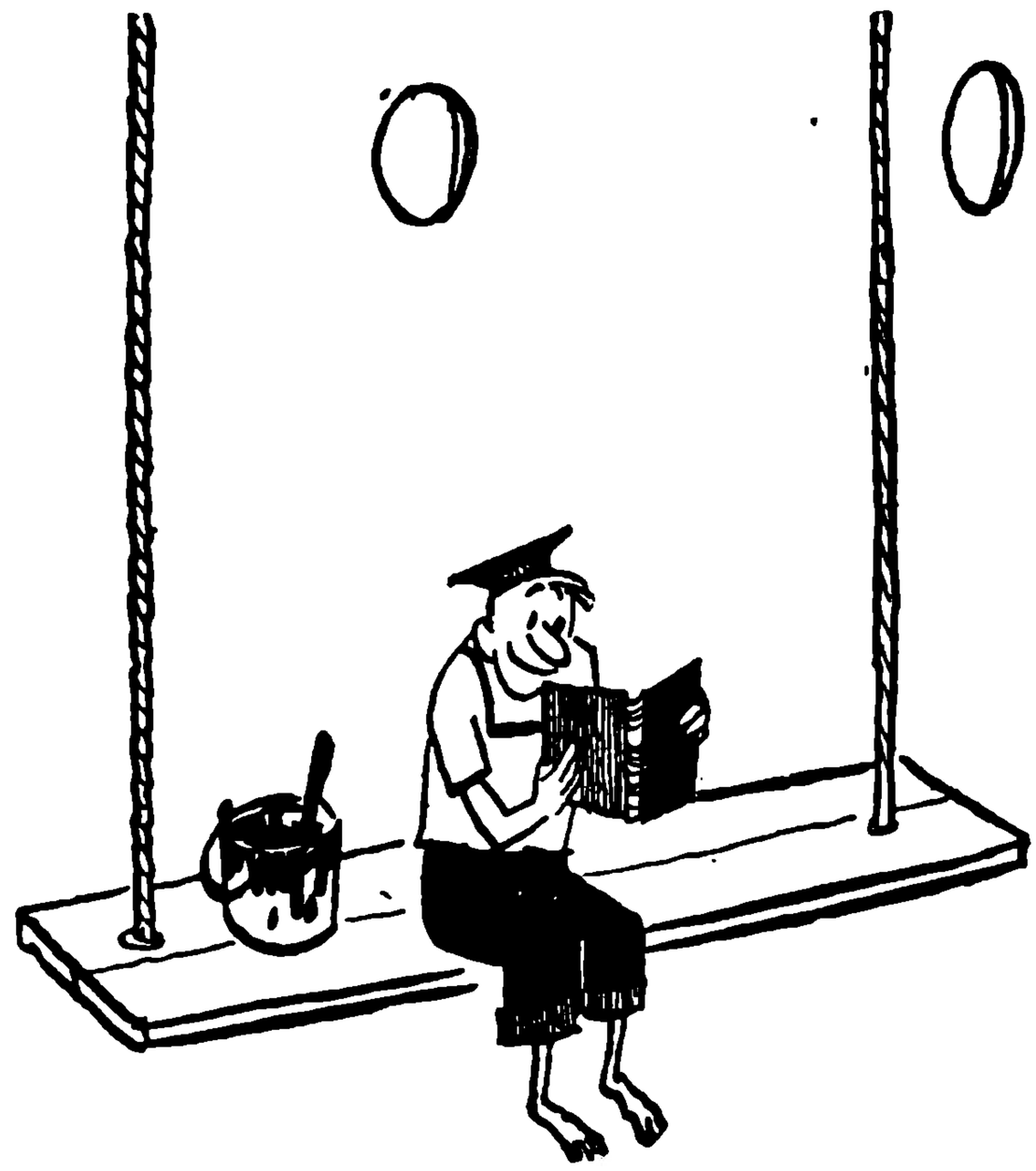
ARGOSY Log Book

DO-it-yourself has hit this country with a bang, and articles appear every day in the press urging readers to have constructive fun making their own dinner-jackets, to employ leisure hours putting a deep-freeze unit in the cellar, or why not make a television set for the family in those long light evenings? (You will need: some valves, some cathode-ray tubes, welding tool, etc.)

So far, do-it-yourself hasn't spread to the field of journalism, but any day now we expect to see helpful hints on how to produce your own magazine at home. (You will need: some paper, some printer's ink, quite a lot of type, and don't forget to wear a big overall. Your friends will be delighted to write the stories.)

In the meantime, we have our own do-it-yourself game and suggest that you get your hand in by thinking up a new title for the story on page 73. Points to remember are: it must not be too long, it must tie in with the subtitle, and it must not conflict with any other title in the issue. Easy? Then print your title on a postcard (in block capitals) and send it in to **"Story Title,"** The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. The best one will net a prize of two guineas.

Entries (as many as you like) must reach us on or before June 30.



Gerald Kersh is a favourite Argosy writer who can dash off a story as stimulating and full of punch as a tot of brandy. Half Russian by birth, he has been in his time baker, night-club bouncer, wrestler, and travelling salesman. He first hit the public eye with his novel *Sergeant Nelson of the Guard*; is now in America gathering material for a new one. *Strange Carnival*, which we print on page 35, shows his usual masterly touch in a tale of a side-show that should never have been seen.

Remember **Michael Foster's** *Secret Company*? Remember *Token of Love*? You will find a new Foster in this issue of Argosy, *The Hot Run* on page 49, a brilliant, fast-moving love story, set among the human realities of police headquarters and newspaper desks.

American **Arthur Gordon** is thirty-seven, wrote the first story he sold while studying at Oxford (some desperate pulp editor bought it, he says). His plots flick from submarine goings-on in the Arctic to beautiful, forsaken girls in Spain.

His new Cinderella on page 7 has a technique that is literally 3D. Gordon has worked on Time magazine, on Good House-keeping (where in three years he rose from reader to Managing Editor), and on Cosmopolitan, which he left in order to write full-time. His first novel, *Reprisal*, was published in 1950 and was an instantaneous success.

Garnett Radcliffe is fifty-eight, and says that having fought in three wars and being married twice has taught him the virtue of taking things as they come. Campaigning on the Indian North-

West Frontier and service with the R.A.F. in South Arabia and Socotra gave him plenty of material for the Eastern backgrounds of his thrillers. He now has a job in London, but sand, palm trees, and minarets continue to dominate his stories—sand of a particularly nasty kind in his new one on page 45.

In view of the doubts recently cast on the authenticity of Borley Rectory, we are pleased to be able to print *Cracken Joke*, a new story by **Clive Burnley** which should be enough to fill anyone's mind with doubts about any ghost anywhere. Clive Burnley is aged forty-two, married, with two children, served in the R.N.V.R. during the war, and lives in Essex, that much-haunted county. Its flatness, he says, accounts for the escapist tendency of his stories.

Heard This One?

An Englishman was showing an American over his house. Opening a bedroom door, he saw his wife in bed with someone else, said, " Oh, sorry," shut the door, took his guest downstairs, and offered him a drink. " But aren't you going to do something about the fellow upstairs? " asked the astonished American. " Oh," said the host. " *he's* a teetotaller."

JOHN SILVER

CINDERELLA SMILE

The lips curved faintly
as if my touch was not unwelcome

BY ARTHUR GORDON

WHENEVER I think of Sylvia, the thing I remember best is her smile. The way it started slowly, deep in her wide blue eyes. The way it would touch the corners of her lovely mouth, hesitantly, and then vanish almost before you knew it was there. A shy smile, a secret smile. I don't know how it affected other men, but I fell halfway in love with Sylvia's smile the first time I saw it.

It was my first night in London. I had come over from New York at the request of the B.B.C. to exchange some technical information on colour television. I was delighted to have the assignment; I had never been in England before. When I met Sylvia, six hours after stepping off the plane, I was even more delighted.

It was at a cocktail party given in my honour by Alan McKenzie, the lean, friendly Scotsman who was to be my sponsor and opposite number at the B.B.C. Since we were both bachelors, several of the guests—not very surprisingly—were pretty girls. And one of the girls was Sylvia.

You know how it is at cocktail parties: you never can remember names, or much of what's been said. But that smile of Sylvia's stayed with me, and her clear English voice, and the touch of her hand when she said good-bye. So I asked Alan about her.

"Sylvia?" he said. "Yes, she's pretty, isn't she? Quiet sort of girl; I like 'em a bit livelier, myself. She works down at the Air Ministry as a photo-interpreter—you know, one of those wizards who can look through a stereoscope at an aerial photograph and tell you just where the enemy has its camouflaged factory. Said to be good at it, too."

"Why isn't she married?"

"Married? Good lord, I don't know! She lives in Kensington with her aunt, an old dragon who keeps a pretty tight rein on her, I'm told. But Sylvia stands to inherit a packet some day, so she just has to put up with it."

"I thought she was wonderful," I said, and I meant it.

"Did you, now? Then why not ask her to do something with us tomorrow night? A theatre, perhaps. I'll get hold of another girl. We could come back here for a cold supper afterwards."

"Think Sylvia will be home by now?"

"Very likely. Why not give her a ring?"

When I identified myself and asked Sylvia to join us the following evening, she hesitated for several seconds. Then she said, "That's very kind of you indeed. I'd love to come, but . . ."

"But what?"

"But my aunt doesn't like me to stay out late. She's all alone here, you see, except for me. I always have to be home before midnight. So perhaps you'd rather . . ."

"That would be all right," I said quickly. "I'll bring you home whenever you say."

"Will you?" It was strange how clearly I could visualize her there at the other end of the wire, could imagine that slow, enchanting little smile.

"It's a promise, Cinderella," I said. And I meant that, too.

The next day was a blur of introductions and preliminary conferences at the B.B.C. Through it all I kept thinking about Sylvia and wishing the evening would come. It was absurd, I knew, but I had a curious feeling that she was also thinking about me.

She met us at the theatre as arranged. Alan's girl was a vivid redhead, animated and gay. She talked a great deal and laughed a lot. Sylvia, on the other hand, said very little—she just smiled her quiet smile as if she had some secret knowledge that brought her great contentment. And I was content just to sit beside her and watch that smile.

In the intervals I did learn a few things about her, of course. That she liked her job. That her hobbies were photography, reading, and going for walks—all rather solitary pursuits, I noted. That her aunt was something of a tyrant, but really a lovable old soul. That she had no other relatives . . .

When the play was over, we took a taxi back to Alan's flat. It was down in Chelsea, at the foot of Tite Street, right on the Embankment. From the windows, even in the darkness, you could see the oily glitter of the Thames. It meant nothing to the others, I suppose, but to me it was much more than just a river; it was two thousand years of recorded history rolling majestically along.

Alan's housekeeper had left us an excellent supper. We ate it and drank a bit, and turned on the wireless and danced. And

it seemed to me no time at all before Sylvia looked anxiously at her watch and said, " It's after eleven, Bill. I really should be getting along."

" Oh no! " I protested. " Why, we've just got here! You said you could stay out until midnight. It won't take us *that* long to get to your place, will it? "

" No," she said, " not if we can find a taxi. But . . ."

" Oh, relax, Sylvia," Alan said cheerfully. " Let the old battle-axe look after herself for once. Who cares if you're a bit late? "

" Aunt Angela does," Sylvia told him. " She's terrified of burglars, although she locks all the windows and doors. But perhaps if I rang up and made sure she's all right . . ."

" Go ahead," Alan said. " There's the phone. Wait till I turn down the wireless."

The old battle-axe answered almost instantly; she must have had the phone right beside her. But when Sylvia asked permission to stay out a bit later than usual, the request was refused with a vehemence that was audible to all of us. Sylvia put the phone down, smiling ruefully. " Well, you heard what she said. Midnight—no later."

" Somebody ought to tell her off," Alan muttered irritably. " A midnight curfew on a girl your age! Why, it's ridiculous! "

" She's old and lonely," Sylvia said. She hesitated. " If you can call a taxi for us, Alan, have it here by a quarter to twelve, I'll stay until then. But no later."

The taxi came, with depressing promptness, at a quarter to twelve. Sylvia and I said good-bye, climbed into it, settled back into the intimate gloom. For perhaps five minutes we moved through the silent, deserted streets. Then I touched her little gloved hand. " Sylvia—" I said.

She did not move her hand. I saw her lips curve faintly, as if my touch was not unexpected—and not unwelcome. With my other hand I turned her face towards me so that I could look into her eyes. " Sylvia—" I said again, and bent to kiss her.

My lips never touched hers. Out of a darkened side street came one of those little British sports cars, much too fast. The driver had a girl beside him; perhaps he was kissing her, too, I don't know. In any case, he saw our taxi too late. He spun his wheel, the tyres squealed, the brakes shrieked. Even so, he side-swiped us smartly just behind our left front wheel. There was a solid jolt, a rending crash of metal, and the two vehicles, locked together, skidded to a stop.

Nobody was hurt; nobody was even shaken up, but our journey is that particular taxi was clearly ended. I felt Sylvia's

fingers, tense on my arm. "Bill," she said, "I mustn't be late. Don't let's get mixed up in this. Let's find another cab—"

"We can't do that," I said, astonished. "It wasn't our driver's fault. We're his only witnesses. We've got to give him our names, at least."

She gave me a despairing glance. "Hurry, then. Please hurry! I'll look for another taxi."

I did hurry, but Sylvia did not find another taxi. In the end, we had to walk, our footsteps loud and urgent in the quiet night. At times Sylvia was almost running. "Take it easy, Cinderella," I said to her once. "Your gown isn't going to turn into rags, you know." But she paid no attention; she barely seemed to hear me.

We came to her house at last, a solid, narrow building with shuttered windows and a massive-looking door. Sylvia was breathing hard. It was after midnight by now, perhaps twenty minutes after, but I could not see why a few minutes should make such a difference to her. I followed her up the short flight of steps. "Got your key?"

"I haven't a key." She pressed the doorbell hard. "My aunt's bedroom is on the ground floor. She always waits up to let me in." We waited. Silence sang around us. Sylvia put her thumb on the doorbell again, and kept it there.

"Something's wrong," she said in a low, tense voice. "I feel it. I know it. She always answers promptly."

"Perhaps," I began, "she—" I got no further.

Sylvia had dropped to her knees, was peering through the narrow rectangular slot above a brass plate marked *Letters*. I heard the sudden, indrawn hiss of her breath, saw her flinch away, put her hands over her face. She gave an inarticulate, sobbing moan. Half a second later I was looking through the slot myself.

My field of vision was necessarily limited, but what I did see I saw all too clearly. It was a small hallway, fairly well lighted. The floor was of some dark wood, highly polished, with a Persian rug centred on it. At the far end was a table bearing candlesticks and a clock, and flanked by two graceful Chippendale chairs. There was nothing unusual, nothing frightening about any of this, but . . .

On the floor, just in front of the table, a woman was lying. Her face was turned away from me; I could see only her iron-grey hair and the back of the long white nightdress that she wore. She lay very, very still. Beside her, half on the rug and half on the floor, was a dark-stained, murderous-looking knife.

For perhaps three seconds I stared, frozen. Then I sprang up

and hurled my full weight against the door. It did not even shudder. I tried again, and only succeeded in bruising my shoulder: I might as well have assaulted a stone wall. I heard Sylvia's voice in my ear, shrill and frantic: "That's no good, Bill! We've got to get the police! There's a telephone round the corner to the left, not very far. Oh, hurry, hurry!"

In two strides I was down the steps. Then I looked back. "What about you?"

"I'm going to try the back door. Or perhaps I can get in through a window. Oh, hurry, Bill! She may be still alive!"

I had no such illusions myself. The huddled form in the nightgown had been too motionless, too deathly still. Even so, I sprinted to the corner, turned left, and ran as fast as I could to the telephone box that stood under a street lamp some fifty yards away.

Fumbling with the unaccustomed coins, frenziedly attempting to read the unfamiliar directions, I was as quick as it was humanly possible to be. Not more than eight or ten minutes had elapsed by the time I came panting back to the house.

The front door was open now, a rectangle of yellow light against the sombre façade. I went up the steps three at a time. Sylvia was kneeling on the floor beside the white-clad figure. She looked at me numbly. "It's no use," she said. "She's dead."

I stepped gingerly over the body, looked once at the parchment-like face, the disordered grey hair, the dark crimson stains on the front of the white nightdress. I felt suddenly dizzy and sat down on one of the Chippendale chairs.

As if I had activated it, the clock on the table chimed the half-hour: one silvery note.

Sylvia buried her face in her hands. "If only I'd come home on time! If only we hadn't been late!" Outside, a car pulled up with a screech of brakes; doors were opened and slammed; the police had arrived.

They were marvellously efficient and polite. A police surgeon arrived, examined the body, and told us what we already knew: that the old lady had died instantly and very recently, death being caused by stab-wounds in the chest. Fingerprint experts went to work, concentrating on the hallway and on the area in the kitchen where Sylvia had found a window-pane broken and the window wide open. Photographers came, took their gruesome pictures, then the mortal remains of Miss Angela Habersham were taken away.

Sylvia and I were interrogated by a quiet man in a dark suit who looked more like a professor than a policeman. Inspector

Burdock was his name. We told him everything and he listened thoughtfully, nodding from time to time.

" It looks very much," he said finally, " as if a prowler broke in through the kitchen window, was surprised by Miss Habersham before he had a chance to steal anything, and killed her before she could give the alarm."

He hesitated, looking at Sylvia. " This has been a nasty shock for you, young lady. If I were you, I should go straight to bed. As for you, sir," he turned to me, " one of our men will drive you to your hotel, if you like. You've been through enough for one night, I'm sure."

I thanked him, said good night to Sylvia, promised to call her in the morning. Her hands were cold, her face looked pale, but her self-control was remarkable. I told her so. " Take a sleeping pill, if you have one," I said. " And above all, don't blame yourself for this. It wasn't your fault that we were late."

I watched her go upstairs to her room. Then I went out to the police car that was waiting for me. As I opened the door, I felt a hand on my arm.

It was Inspector Burdock. " Before you go, Mr. Carter," he said, " I wonder if you'd just review this whole affair once more in your mind. Go over it carefully and see if there's anything—anything at all—that strikes you as odd, or out of key, or peculiar in any way. I know you've told me everything, but sometimes it's the little things . . . Well, start with that phone call from Mr. McKenzie's flat, if you will, and review everything up to the moment the police arrived."

I tried to do as he asked, but I was so tired that my brain felt numb. It seemed to function slowly and with great effort. Burdock stood beside me patiently.

" Well," I said finally, " there's only one thing I do remember now that strikes me as rather odd. It doesn't seem very important, and to tell you the truth when I looked through that letter-slot I was so startled that I might easily have imagined this. But my impression at the time was that the clock on the table had only one hand. Or seemed to have only one . . ."

Burdock's grey eyes were watching me intently. " You mean, both hands were together, is that it?"

" That's right. They showed the time to be midnight. Or so I thought. And yet, when I came back from the telephone eight or ten minutes later, I remember hearing the clock chime the half-hour." I shook my head. " My first impression must have been wrong. The clock must have indicated twelve-twenty, and for some reason I just didn't see the minute-hand."

Burdock was silent for a moment. " Mr. Carter," he said

finally, " I'm afraid you've had a long and very disagreeable evening as it is. But would you mind waiting here in the car for a little longer? I'll try to be as quick as I can."

" Won't it keep until tomorrow? " I asked him wearily.

" Tomorrow might be too late," he said. " Please wait."

He turned, went up the steps, and into the house. I waited. Ten minutes passed. Twenty. Half an hour. Abruptly the car door opened and Burdock peered in. His face might have been a mask. I couldn't read anything in it. " Come with me, please, Mr. Carter," he said.

Half dazed with fatigue, I followed him up the steps. The door was closed. Burdock stopped in front of it, indicated the letter slot. " Take another look," he said.

The request seemed senseless, but I was too tired to care. I shrugged my shoulders, dropped to one knee, peered through the slot—and felt my heart give a terrifying leap. Because it was all there, just as it had been before: the stained knife, the still figure in the white nightdress, the hands of the clock fixed immovably upon midnight.

I think I gave a strangled shout. I know I recoiled from the slot as if the brass plate beneath it were red-hot. I felt Burdock's strong hands on my shoulders. " Easy does it, Mr. Carter," he said.

He pushed open the door, stepped behind it. When he reappeared, he had an oblong object about the size of a shoebox in his hands. " I don't blame you for being startled. Or for being fooled. You were actually looking through a stereoscope at a double photograph. The scale, the lighting, the three-dimensional effect—all just about perfect. Perfect enough, anyway: the human eye has a fatal tendency to see what it expects to see."

I stared at him, stupefied. " Photograph! You mean that *Sylvia*—"

" I was sure she did it," Burdock said. " I just couldn't see how. By making that phone call from McKenzie's, she had established the fact that her aunt was alive at a few minutes past eleven. Then she was in your company constantly until the body—apparently—was discovered. Really rather clever, you know! Actually, of course, she waited until you went to call the police. Then she let herself in with her key, which she had all the time, called her aunt out into the hall on some pretext, and killed her the way you might slap a mosquito. Then she took care of her other little chores: reconnecting the doorbell, going back to the kitchen and breaking a window, unhooking this

gadget from the back of the door and putting it in the place where it would attract the least attention . . ."

"Where?" My brain was spinning. I couldn't believe my own senses.

"In her darkroom," Burdock said. "Among a dozen other stereoscopes and all sorts of equipment. I suppose she planned to destroy it as soon as she had the time. But you never know—she may have intended to keep it to remind herself of her own cleverness. That's the way these super-criminals are, sometimes."

"But the photograph itself—where did she get it?"

"She took it, of course. Probably had a timing-device on the shutter that enabled her to play the part of the corpse."

"Good lord," I said. "In a grey wig!"

"Exactly." He wrinkled his forehead thoughtfully. "I suppose, photographically speaking, it was no great trick for an Air Ministry photo-interpreter. Still, she must have been planning it for a long time. And if you hadn't noticed the discrepancy in the clock, she might have got away with it."

"But why me?" I burst out suddenly. "Why pick on me?"

Burdock rubbed the back of his hand across his chin. "Well, she knew you were a recent arrival, and probably unfamiliar with our telephone boxes. Obviously, she wanted you to stay away as long as possible. She needed all the time she could get. And then, of course, knowing that you were an American . . ." He broke off suddenly.

"Yes?"

"She may have—er—felt," said Burdock with an apologetic little cough, "that you were not—er—terribly bright!"

The British have a stern sense of justice. They took Sylvia, tried her before a jury of twelve good men and true, and hanged her by her pretty neck until she was dead—just as dead as the old lady whose money she could not wait to inherit.

I was there when the judge put the black cap on his head and sentenced her to hang. I was there, and I was watching her. She didn't scream or faint or do anything like that. She just kept smiling faintly.

Oh yes, whenever I think of Sylvia, the thing I best remember is that wistful, innocent smile. And the memory of it freezes me still—right down to the marrow of my bones.

★ ★ ★

EGGING ON

A hen is only an egg's way of making another egg.

SAMUEL BUTLER

OUT FOR A DUCK

Crisp, golden, ringed with roast potato
—he could taste it

BY CHARLES C. O'CONNELL

MICK HAYS watched the advent of the yellow caravan with deep disfavour. He had long ago formed the opinion that many of the vagrant class lived by their wits, and the arrival of this unmistakable vehicle meant that to all intents and purposes his own sphere of activity would now be halved.

For a moment as the caravan drew closer, his disapproval gave way to grudging admiration. The horse imprisoned between the shafts would not have been out of place under the new hearse of Dinny Jones, the Rathcumin undertaker, and furthermore, the yellow wheels with their plethora of multicoloured designs were rolling wonders. Such artistry and horseflesh momentarily assuaged the scowl on Mick's face, but he had it back on again when the caravan drew level with him.

A small man with grey hair and steel-rimmed spectacles pulled on the reins and doffed a battered hat. "Beg pardon," he said in an accent that was neither Rathcumin nor Irish, "will you tell me if there is a pond anywhere along the road?"

The cultured accent took Mick aback. He slithered off the ditch. "A pond, you say? Well, now, there's nothing like that for miles along here. But there's a stream running beside the road just around the corner. There's a nice grass margin to the road, too, if it's camping you have in mind."

The little man nodded his satisfaction. "That will do admirably. I'm much obliged to you, Mr. —?"

"Hays is the name, sir—Michael Hays, at your service."

"Thank you, Mr. Hays. Mine is Limp."

Mick stared his surprise. "Limp?"

The little man gathered the reins. "Yes, I'm afraid that is my name. A poor thing, as the poet said, but mine own."

A little bewildered but definitely intrigued, Mick followed the caravan to where the stream flowed from Clancy's field. Here Mr. Limp skilfully manœuvred his vehicle onto the grass margin and, taking a spade from the side, quickly set to work.

With long strips of turf cut from the ditch, buttressed with stones, he dammed the stream across. He moved nimbly on his feet, lips pursed in a toneless whistle. A grey forelock hung over his forehead and his spectacles were misted with perspiration when finally he rested on his spade to survey his work. The water was already swelling behind the dam, spreading out over the grass margin, but before it could flow onto the road, the level of the stream reached the top of the dam and spilt over.

The little man breathed a sigh of relief and rubbed his hands together; then, keeping up the same toneless whistle, he unlocked a large boxlike compartment beneath the rear axle of the caravan, withdrew a bolt, and allowed the door to swing down on its hinges until it rested on the grass like a miniature gangway.

Immediately, unmistakable farmyard noises came from within, and before the astonished gaze of Mick Hays, a procession of ducks waddled sedately down the gangway and slid into the improvised pond, wagging their tails and giving vociferous expression to their pleasure. Eight ducks had taken to the water before the little man closed the door.

He beamed at Mick over his glasses. "The little ones are happy again."

Mick tilted his hat back from his forehead and scratched his stubble. "What do you do with all the ducks? Sell them?"

The other sighed. "Not if I can help it. These are my children. But sometimes"—he shrugged his shoulders—"it is necessary that we make a sacrifice and we have to part with one of them. This makes me sad but one must live, and to live, one must eat."

"You mean you eat them?"

The little man's eyebrows came down in a heavy frown. "Do you think I am a cannibal? It would be like eating my own flesh and blood."

Without waiting for Mick to speak, he tramped around the caravan and, evidently piqued, began to unharness the horse.

Mick Hays looked meditatively at the birds. They were all alike, light brown with orange bills, and one alone was distinguishable from her sisters. She had a circle of white down around her neck, like a thin collar, and this piece of originality seemed to ostracize her from her own kin for she floated a little apart with an air of dignified superiority.

In Mick's mind, the duck became suddenly transformed. The down was gone, so were the feet, and it lay on its back, crisp and golden, surrounded by a tight circle of roasted potatoes. The vision was fleeting but enticing.

Mick swallowed his saliva and took a swift look round. The

little man had apparently gone inside the caravan. The chances of making a getaway were pretty good. Twenty yards farther on, the road bent round a clump of rock and furze. It wouldn't take half a minute to reach that point and from there he could cut across the fields to the village. It would be easy. Besides, this befuddled old gent mightn't even miss the duck until late in the evening . . .

Uncertain yet as to what he would do, Mick advanced a pace to the pond. All the ducks with the exception of the one with the white collar scurried to the far end of the pond.

" I think you want me to take you, you rogue," muttered Mick, crouching at the water's edge. Slowly he extended his hand. The other ducks cowered against the ditch, but the dignified one merely wagged her tail and stared indifferently at the outstretched hand. Mick edged a little closer until his fingers were barely an inch from the bird's neck. The duck seemed to half-close one eye.

" Quit the clowning, buddy," said the duck. " You know you can't get away with any rough stuff."

Mick snatched his hand away as if it had been scalded and sat down suddenly on the road.

As soon as the first shock passed, reason suggested that somebody else had spoken. Mick looked round. There was nobody in sight. He could hear Mr. Limp at his chores inside the caravan. He stared at the duck in bewilderment. The yellow bill was open and the tail flicked from side to side. There seemed to be a most intelligent glint in the little beady eyes.

" Tell me," said Mick, " did you say something a while ago, or am I going crazy? "

The duck cocked its head, flicked its tail, and then in complete indifference whipped some insect morsel from the surface of the water. Mick exhaled slowly in relief . . . The tricks that imagination can play on you!

" Sure I said something a while ago," said the duck suddenly, " but that don't prove that you're not crazy."

Mick almost fell into the pond. There was no possibility of being mistaken this time. Either he was crazy or the bird was talking.

" Where did you learn to talk? " he gasped.

The duck wagged its head and spoke through a closed bill. " Never mind where I learnt to talk. You were going to snatch me, weren't you? Well, forget it, brother. Lay a finger on me or any of the others, and I'll holler so loud you'll hear me all over the country."

Mick raised his right hand. "Never such a thought entered my head. I was only admiring you."

"Admiring me all trussed up and roasted, I bet," said the duck.

Just then Mr. Limp came out of the caravan. He seemed surprised to see Mick still there. He adjusted his spectacles and surveyed the pond as though he were mentally counting the ducks.

"You know," said Mick, "they're mighty uncommon ducks."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Limp, "they are rare birds. I bred them myself. In fact, I have devoted a lifetime to cross-breeding ducks. You would be astonished at the results."

Mick nodded his head. "I can see now why you're so fond of them, and that's a strange coincidence in itself, for I always had a great affection for the same birds."

Mr. Limp's face lit up. "You like ducks?"

"Like them!" Mick scorned the understatement. "I have a passion for them. I used to spend hours watching them play around my pond." He shook his head sadly. "They were happy days when I had a hundred of them birds."

"A hundred!" The little man's eyebrows shot up an inch above his lenses.

"Maybe more," said Mick blandly. "I never counted them very carefully. As a matter of fact, while I was watching your little collection, I made up my mind to ask you to sell me one of them—just to start again."

Mr. Limp considered this thoughtfully. "I'd hate to part with any of them, although just now times are going hard with me; but I'm afraid these birds are very expensive. They vary in value. Which one had you thought of buying?"

With studied carelessness Mick indicated the talking duck. "That little one there with the white band around her neck will do."

Mr. Limp nodded as if he had expected some such answer.

"You must realize that none of these are ordinary ducks, and of all the birds I have, that one is the most extraordinary. As I told you, I have devoted a lifetime to cross-breeding—not only ducks, but parrots and pigeons as well. Do you know what the grandfather of your choice was? A parrot—yes, Mr. Hays, a big full-blooded Brazilian parrot captured by me personally in Matto Grosso. You may not believe this, but that bird can actually talk, not merely echo what you say, but carry on a rational conversation."

Mick looked astonished. "Go on!"

"But," Mr. Limp's voice took on a tragic note, "that bird is a disappointment to me."

Running his tongue over dry lips, Mick saw in Mr. Limp's

disappointment a definite depreciation in the value of the bird.

" How's that now, sir? I think it's wonderful to have a talking bird."

Mr. Limp shook his head. "It is not enough. There is pigeon's blood in that duck. I taught her to talk like a human, fly like a swallow, and I hoped she would have the homing instinct of a pigeon."

He gripped Mick's arm tightly, and his gaze shot off to some imagined battlefield. " Do you realize what the value of such a bird would be in times of war? A bird that could deliver verbal reports of enemy positions, report on troop concentrations, and return to its base?" His eyes lost their lustre. " But, alas, I failed."

Mick dragged his mind's eye from the blazing cannons and flying shrapnel. " How was that now? "

Mr. Limp sighed. " The bird's a fool. She gets herself lost. Her homing instinct just isn't there. Then she has a bad memory and a low intelligence, along with a criminal outlook—thanks to bad blood somewhere." The little man shook his head. " Maybe I'm blaming the bird too much. Maybe it is my fault."

Mick shook his head vigorously. " Naw! " he almost bawled. " 'Tis the bird's fault. I don't blame you for wanting to sell her. Name your price and I'll take her off your hands. Why, Mr. Limp, with her line of conversation and bad habits she's liable to corrupt the rest of the birds."

" I thought of that," said Mr. Limp, " and I'm afraid I must agree with you. That bird must go for the sake of the others."

He looked at Mick sharply. " But I'm sure you will realize that, with all her faults, she is still a very valuable bird. One could make a fortune just by exhibiting her. But I know you are an honourable man—I have an instinct in these matters. I shall let you have the duck for five pounds."

Mick swallowed. At that particular moment he hadn't five-pence, but he realized that the price was very low for such an extraordinary bird. Time was what he wanted now.

" That seems a reasonable price, Mr. Limp, but, of course, I haven't got that much money on me right now. I'll just nip up to my place in the village and come back as soon as possible." In his eagerness to be gone he almost stumbled. " Give me ten minutes."

Mr. Limp waved his hand. " Take your time, Mr. Hays; the day is long and I shan't be leaving until tomorrow."

It is astonishing how unenthusiastic and stubborn some people can be. Mick discovered this for himself soon after he contacted

Larry Max. This old retired sailor was the only person Mick could think of who would be able to put up the money for the Talking Duck Venture. Rumour had it that he had accumulated a fortune during his long years at sea.

"I was forty years at sea," he told Mick, when he had heard the story of Mr. Limp's prodigy, "and in most countries of the world. I heard of all kinds of birds and saw some very strange ones, but I never heard of a talking duck."

He wanted to know if Mick had been drinking. Mick almost lost his temper. Larry and he had crossed swords many times in the past, but never before had there been greater need for diplomacy.

"Larry boy, I'm not asking you to *give* me five pounds. It's an investment in a project that will make both of us rich. In a week, after visiting one of the big cities, we'll be lighting our pipes with five-pound notes. You'll laugh when you remember how hard you were at the start."

Larry remained unimpressed. "I think you're drunk, Mick," was his only observation.

Mick swallowed his wrath and nearly choked in the process. "Will you come down to Mr. Limp with me and see for yourself? Nobody's asking you to buy a pig in a poke."

Larry thought this was reasonable, and together they made tracks for the pond. The caravan was deserted when they arrived. Some of the ducks had abandoned the pond to go slobbering upstream, but they still numbered eight, and the one with the thin white collar still floated serenely on the water.

There was no response to Mick's knock on the caravan door. Apparently Mr. Limp had temporarily abandoned his charges.

Larry surveyed the ducks. "Which one talks?"

Mick indicated the one with the white band around its neck. "There she is."

Larry took his pipe from his mouth and looked critically at the duck. "Well, why isn't she talking? I'm listening."

Mick looked contemptuously at his friend. "You don't think the bird's a blabber-mouth. She's too polite to speak until she's spoken to. Just listen to this—" He crouched near the edge of the pond and snapped his fingers—"Hullo, there. Do you remember me?"

The duck looked apathetically at Mick and turned its back.

"I brought my friend along to see you. He don't believe you can talk."

The duck scooped water into its bill and gargled.

"I'll say this much for her," said Larry dryly, "she's no blabber-mouth."

A slight perspiration bedewed Mick's brow. He fought down an instinct to wrap strangling fingers around the white circle of down.

"Please, ducky!" he begged. "Your reputation is at stake. Please say something to my friend."

The bird turned round and seemed to snap its bill at Larry.

"What do you want me to say?" asked the duck.

Mick swung about just in time to prevent Larry falling into the water. The sailor's pipe hissed out on the surface of the pond.

When Larry had recovered, Mr. Limp put in an unexpected appearance, as if he had materialized out of thin air. He smiled at Mick and nodded cordially when the dazed sailor was introduced to him.

"I brought him along to see the duck," explained Mick.

Mr. Limp looked pleased. "Was he impressed?"

Larry answered for himself by giving a brief resumé of his wanderings in the various countries and ports he had visited during his nautical life, followed by the solemn statement that, though he had seen all sort of birds in all sorts of climes, he had never in all his born days seen a bird like that.

Mr. Limp flushed with pleasure, and Larry extracted a purse to gouge five single pound notes from its depths.

"We're taking the duck, Mr. Limp," explained Mick.

Tears glistened in the little man's eyes when the moment of parting arrived. "You're going to a new life, old girl," he said to the duck. "Don't think too harshly of me for this. Think of yourself as one sacrificing herself so that vital research may go ahead. Your new master is an honourable man. He will be good to you."

Emotion choked him, and Mick felt very near to tears as he turned away.

"Good-bye, boss," the duck called over Mick's shoulder. "Don't worry about me."

As they hurried homeward, Larry and Mick were already planning for the future. They would, they reasoned, either go on the stage or on the road. If they adopted the latter procedure they would need a tent and a caravan—just for a start. They were convinced that it would be possible to build an entire circus round the duck. Mick was speculating on the current prices of lions and tigers, when they reached Larry's back garden.

They tied a string around the duck's neck and tethered her to a peg. Then they dug a sizeable hole in the ground and filled it with water from the hose. They didn't attempt to speak to the bird until she had waddled into her natural element. Then they

asked her all sorts of questions, made appealing gestures, pleaded with heartbreaking eloquence, raved, and threatened, but beyond an occasional apathetic "Quack," not as much as a single intelligent syllable escaped the yellow bill. Both men were covered with mud and perspiration and the sun was low in the sky, when the Great Truth dawned on Larry Max. He clutched Mick by the sleeve. "Did you ever hear of ventriloquism?"

Mick had. The horrible possibilities of his friend's question stunned him. "You mean—?"

"I mean," snarled Larry, "that Limp was doing the talking instead of the bird."

With one great stride Mick stepped into the pond and imprisoned the startled bird between his hands. "Let's go after him."

When they reached the site, Mr. Limp and caravan had gone. Even the dam had been removed, and all that remained were the imprints of the iron-rimmed wheels on the turf. There was nothing to indicate how long ago the little man had left and where he had gone to.

It was then that Larry Max drew on his extensive and colourful nautical vocabulary. He danced a war-dance on the road. After a long while, exhaustion brought a moment's silence, and timid Mick proffered the duck to his enraged companion, whereat Larry, calling on unsuspected reserves of strength, enlarged and revised his previous tirade, snatched the bird from Mick's hands, and hurled it into the stream.

The bird landed awkwardly and shook the mud from its eyes.

"Hi!" she hooted. "Who d'ya think you're pushing around?"

She eluded the two pairs of hands that came hurtling in her direction, rose swiftly into the air, circled once, and then headed south, away from the village.

Something in the directness of her flight made it evident that, besides having the flight of a swallow and the speech of a human being, she had, too, the homing instinct of a pigeon.

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Across. 1, *Precept.* 4, *Brigham.* 9, *Distraining.* 11, *Trip.* 12, *Goth.* 13, *Wigtown.* 15, *Angles.* 16, *Needle.* 17, *Get.* 19, *Nausea.* 20, *Outlay.* 22, *Yew.* 25, *Thebes.* 27, *Deputy.* 28, *Ravager.* 29, *Rout.* 31, *Tent.* 32, *Lion-hearted.* 33, *Disease.* 34, *Wealthy.*

Down. 1, *Plateau.* 2, *Clip.* 3, *Patois.* 5, *Renown.* 6, *Gong.* 7, *Michael.* 8, *Castle.* 9, *Disgraceful.* 10, *Good-natured.* 13, *Welsher.* 14, *Neither.* 17, *Gay.* 18, *Tow.* 21, *Storied.* 23, *Elated.* 24, *Mystery.* 26, *Saints.* 27, *Degree.* 30, *Tide.* 31, *Teal.*

FAIR GAME

It was more than desire
this strange tenderness

BY J. M. ROSEN

MACALISTER led the party along a fern-hung cleft down to the creek bank. They climbed down cautiously, their feet sliding on the damp ground that was carpeted with a slippery mat of brown needles from the overhanging she-oaks. The clear, pale spring sunshine sparkled aslant the mountains and tipped the saplings of the nearer ridges with gold. Misting away to the westward skyline lay the farther ridges, fold upon blue fold, shrouded in haze.

Macalister stopped at the edge of the creek, where the water ran clear and limpid over sandy shallows speckled with small round quartz pebbles. "The boundary crosses the creek line," he said. "Do you want to go along?"

Cohn nodded. He turned to his wife. "What about you, Sonia? Would you rather wait here?"

He smoothed his flat brown hair with his hand as he spoke, and Macalister thought again that Cohn looked like a seal. A smooth, sleek seal, waiting to have a fish thrown to it.

Cohn's wife smiled. "But I'd love to go along," she said, "you know how I love bush-walking."

"She does too," said Cohn smugly. "My wife's a great nature lover." And he gave Macalister a long slow smile which comprehended the woman, her mature, full-blown beauty, the strong full shape of her in her yellow sweater and cloth jodhpurs. She was his, he seemed to say, and all her attributes, including her desire to go clambering along the creek with them, were part of his complacent competence, his soft sealy selfness.

"It's pretty rough walking," said Macalister gruffly.

Sonia only laughed. Macalister understood that laugh. Cohn's words, his glances, his complacence embraced the woman, but the woman was self-sufficient: she hugged herself to herself and admired her own full health, her agile body, firmly closed in the cloth breeches and swelling strongly beneath the close woollen sweater, and Cohn scarcely entered her calculations at all.

"Larry can give you a hand over the rough stretches," said Macalister, and they came down to the creek bank where he stood, the boy Larry, Macalister's brother, hanging sulkily in the rear. Cohn and Macalister went ahead, Macalister pointing out the blazings that marked the boundary line, first on one side of the creek, then on the other, in a zigzag along the banks. Sonia and Macalister's brother followed behind, the boy silent and apparently involved in thoughts of his own.

Sonia Cohn looked at the boy covertly. She wondered how old he was, fourteen perhaps or fifteen, but already male, almost fully grown. He was like Macalister, but with a certain appealing softness and slimness. And yet he was strong, with lean, taut thigh muscles. His skin was brown and suffused with a faint warmth, a dusky glow like the bloom on a dark, hard peach. She thought there was something southern, some almost Italian liquidity of glance, superimposed on the northern harshness and the sharp, hard angularity of bone that bespoke the Scottish name he bore. She glanced again at the long, taut line of his thigh, the flat boy's flanks, and a sharp tremor of excitement ran through her own mature flesh.

Cohn walked carefully, picking out the flat dry rocks in the creek bed and stepping across them neatly. Macalister strode roughly, scarcely glancing at Cohn, only stopping occasionally to point out a peg or a tree-blaze.

"I suppose the creek goes dry in the summer," said Cohn.

"Pretty well," said Macalister. "You might get a pool or two."

"Not much chance of making a permanent swimming-pool," said Cohn.

Macalister spoke slowly. "All the bedding of the rocks here slopes to the eastward," he said, "so you get a run-off. But you could make a pool all right if you used a sealer. Put in a concrete bottom and a wall to hold it."

"I'd like to do something like that," said Cohn. "The place could be beautified."

"Only needs a bit of money spent on it," said Macalister.

Cohn nodded assent. His mind was busy on improvements.

Sonia had sent the boy scrambling up the creek bank after a waratah. It was blooming early, standing stiffly erect and alone, the rosy cup of the flower pinkish and gleaming against the glossy dark green leaf spikes.

"It's beautiful!" she cried, taking it from him. "Don't you think it's beautiful?"

"I saw a mound up there," said the boy. "Want to see it?"

She went up after him. He showed her the perfectly symmetrical, cleared, flattish mound of earth half hidden by the brushwood.

" What is it? " she asked.

" The lyre-birds make them," he said.

" Are there lyre-birds here? " she asked.

" Hereabouts," said the boy. " Must be a pair in this gully. You only get one pair to a gully."

" Do you think we might see them? " she asked.

" Not likely," said the boy. " I wouldn't mind taking a pot at one, though."

" But you wouldn't do that! " she said, horrified.

" Why not? " said the boy. " If I had a gun with me . . ." He fell silent . . .

Macalister and Cohn came to a place where a smaller creek joined the main stream. The water at this point was wider, running out into a sandy bar. Dragon-flies darted over the brown rippling surface. The men sat down on a wide flat rock. Cohn lit a cigarette and Macalister swished at the surface of the water with a handful of reedy grasses.

" Do you want to keep on going? " said Macalister.

" May as well," said Cohn. " Like to see what I'm buying."

So he's coming round to it, thought Macalister, I'm getting him in. He was lucky. Cohn was fair game. Macalister was pretty sure Cohn had heard of the settlement. Thought he'd cash in on the development. Cohn hadn't let on, and there was no occasion for Macalister to tell him that the settlement had already been abandoned.

Macalister looked across at the ridges. They looked green enough, and there was new fern growth all along the creek banks, but when the summer came, all the ridges would be arid and lifeless again.

He used to come to this creek when he was a nipper, when the old man was working on the orchard. Nothing left of the orchard now and the land didn't seem fit to grow anything. Nobody had orchards along these lower ridges nowadays, only a few dusty chicken pens, and withered-looking vegetable patches scratched out of the dry, barren sand.

He wondered if the old man had struck a run of good seasons, or if the climate had changed, or perhaps the fires had eaten the goodness from the soil. Before the fires, he remembered, the old man had had peaches, great bucketfuls of peaches they had gathered, and his mother had had a garden, with lilac trees.

But all that was a long time ago. Cohn could have joy of it now, with his swimming-pool and his improvements.

Macalister stretched lazily. No need to tell Cohn that the settlement was only another brain child, strangled at birth. There had been talk of settlements before, villages to be planted on the arid ridges, with water to be brought to them, good roads and bus services. Sometimes the land had been cleared in readiness, a half-hearted foundation laid, but one after another the schemes had been abandoned, defeated by lethargy, by dry seasons, by the barren, unyielding soil.

Now there was talk again, talk of development, talk of opening up all the lower mountains, but Macalister knew that talk would come to nothing, that the schemes would dwindle and the mountains lie barren and dusty, parched in the summer, green and deceptive in the spring, fire-swept in the dry season.

He pointed. " Over there is the power line," he said.

Cohn looked at the long slender cables, swinging off into the distance. " The railway," he said.

" Electrification will make a big difference," said Macalister.

" Might be a long time," said Cohn, off-handedly, but Macalister saw the leap of cupidity in the round seal-eyes and smiled inwardly.

Sonia and the boy caught up with them. " Tired? " said Cohn.

Sonia sat next to him, stretching her legs out in front of him. " We saw a lyre-bird mound," she said.

" Really? " said Cohn. He thought vaguely that the mound must be a nest, but he did not ask her. It would have placed him at a disadvantage to ask. There was so much she knew that he did not understand.

But he was pleased that she had come across something that had obviously given her pleasure. At the back of his mind, mixed up with his shrewdness when he considered his purchase, was the shy desire to make her a gift. He could not share in that facet of her complex personality whereby she derived pleasure from rambling through the bushland, and was tender for birds and flowers. He hardly knew one tree from another, but it pleased him to think that he could make her a gift of a slice of bushland and all that was in it, even a lyre-bird mound.

Would she see it as a gift? He remembered unhappily that she had once accused him of wanting to offer her up her own attributes, as a gift from himself. Would she see it in that way also? He wanted to ask her, but she had turned away, seeming abstracted and sleepy with the sun, and he sat, waiting, clumsily turning the words over in his mind.

Sonia was watching the boy, who was dabbling his legs in the dark water, flecked round by the dazzle of sunlight on its rippled surface. Again the tremor of excitement ran through her.

What did she want with the boy? She hardly knew. Something in his boy's slimness reached out to her and something in her answered that was at once curiously tender, beautiful, and yet at the same time urgent and destructive. She closed her eyes and let the warmth of the sun beat on her and the warmth of the sun-warmed rock flow through her.

Cohn looked at her again, was about to speak, and fell silent.

Macalister, too, was watching her, appraising her warm, relaxed felinity. The strong, soft cat that basks in the sun, and through narrowed eyes seeks its prey. His glance fell on Larry. A momentary anger shook him, but his thoughts moved swiftly. She was strong, she was rich, and through her Cohn had his existence.

"You like this life, Mrs. Cohn?" he said.

"Oh, very much," she said huskily. "I could stay here in the sun for ever."

"Stay here with Larry, then," he said. "I'll take your husband to the end of the boundary."

Cohn jumped up, carefully smoothing the creases of his trousers.

Macalister sprang onto the rocky barrier ahead, where a little waterfall splashed over the ledge of rock, and the sun sparked the spray breaking from it into spattering diamond-fire. He stretched out his hand to Cohn, who jumped awkwardly. Sonia lay lazily and through narrowed lids watched them climb out of sight.

"Come here, Larry," she called, "and sit by me."

But when the boy climbed up to her, she was nervous and impatient. "Let's go on after them," she said quickly, rising to her feet.

The boy went up nimbly and held down his hand. As she reached the top she stood close to him, pressed against him as if by accident, and she did not release his hand. A tremor of excitement passed through her, and deliberately she held his hand close to her body, trying to communicate the swift current to him.

Suddenly the boy broke from her and stood tense and listening.

"What is it?" she whispered.

His eyes were on the sloping bank. She, too, could detect a stirring, a heavy rustling in the undergrowth, and something dark seemed to move for a moment in the bushes.

"What is it?" she repeated. "A wallaby?"

The boy shook his head. "I think it's a lyre-bird," he whispered, a little hoarsely. He, too, was trembling.

She stood close to him, flattening her body against him as they stood in the shelter of the rock. To any casual observer they

might have been innocently silent, watching the unsuspecting bird. She did not know if the boy himself thought any more of her action than that she was intent on the bird, but she could feel his heart beating strongly.

Was it only on account of the bird that his heart was beating? Was there a bird? She could see nothing.

Then suddenly the bird appeared. It was quite large—larger than a domestic fowl—and dark in colour, with a long draggling tail. It raked about for a while in the soft earth, pushing the leaves and twigs behind it with its feet. The feet seemed clumsy and out of all proportion to its body.

For a few moments it seemed unaware of their presence, then suddenly it cocked its head in their direction and regarded them curiously from its extraordinarily large brown eyes. It seemed completely unafraid and came closer, with a curious hopping run.

"It's a hen bird," said the boy.

The bird fluttered on a few paces and stopped to look back at them. It flew heavily and awkwardly. The boy moved after it, and Sonia followed carefully, afraid of scaring the bird away. But the bird was curious, interested, and merely hopped on a few paces, keeping a little ahead of them.

"Gee," said the boy, "I wish I had a gun. I'd take a pot at it."

"You wouldn't shoot it!" she said angrily. "Look how trusting it is, how tame! What good would it do you to shoot it?"

The boy scowled. "I like shooting things," he said sulkily.

"Besides, it's protected," she said.

"Who's to know?" he muttered, his eyes on the bird. The bird had perched on a stump, its long feathers draggling behind it. "Its feathers get bent," he said, "sitting on the nest."

She wondered if there were a chick hidden somewhere in the scrub. Perhaps the hen bird was decoying them away from it, leading them farther off with its hopping, fluttering run along the creek bank, resting on the stump, watching their movements anxiously.

"Leave it be," she said. "Let it go back to its nest, if it has one."

"Why should I?" he said, and he ran suddenly at the bird, flapping his arms. The bird flew off heavily, seeming to jump as much as fly, gradually going higher and higher each time into the branches.

"I think you're horrid," she said. "Why did you have to frighten it? Poor wild thing, look how it trusted us."

He shied a pebble across the treetops.

" I think you'd better go after the others, if you want to," she said. " I'll sit here. Maybe the lyre-bird will come back again."

" It won't," he said confidently, and went off whistling loudly, like an urchin.

She sat on the creek bank, trembling. What did she want with him? He was an urchin, a wild thing, as tender and vulnerable in his way as the bird was.

What was it she felt? It was more than desire, this strange tenderness. She wanted more than to feel his boy's body respond to her, but at the same time she could not free herself from the thought of contagion, of obscenity. How was she in any way different from the lust-crazed old harridan who takes a boy to her bed, from the dirty old man who forces his body against the young body of a girl in a crowded carriage?

She was filled with strange tenderness for his body, but at the same time she recognized the harsh beak of destructiveness in her thoughts that would tear and destroy him, the desire to possess and enter, the desire that had shaken her for the proud rosy young bud on the waratah, to own and possess, leave valueless. What was it in her that could not leave the bud in its dark leaves, that had to penetrate the dark secret of the boy's virginity?

She felt sick and trembling. She would not! she would not! She looked around nervously for Cohn, as if he might be a buttress in her weakness.

But it was Macalister who got back first.

" Larry tells me you saw a lyre-bird," he shouted. " What luck for you! I'll bet Larry wished he had a gun with him."

" He did," she said. " He would have shot it."

" The boy's crazy for guns," said Macalister.

Cohn came up behind her quietly. He waited until Macalister was out of earshot.

" I think I'll buy," he said softly. " Don't let on to Macalister what I told you about the settlement. You didn't say anything, did you? "

" No," she said dully. " I didn't say anything."

" The place will double in value as soon as they go ahead with the settlement. Macalister's a fool. Roads, electric light, a bus service, everything—"

Larry came back, swishing with a stick at the undergrowth. She avoided his glance, and he went scrambling after Macalister, calling to him to stop. Macalister turned and waited for him. " I think I've made a deal," he said. " That fat seal, Cohn, thinks the settlement is coming. The sucker. Don't let on to him what I told you, or I'll bust your head open."

"About the settlement being off?" said Larry. "See if I care! What do you want to sell for? I want to come up here shooting." He paused. "When you get me my gun," he added sulkily.

"Why don't you ask Mrs. Cohn to get you a gun?" said Macalister. "Can't you see she's got tickets on you?"

"That old—" the boy started, and then his mouth fell half open. "Whatcha mean?" he said.

"She's hot," said Macalister. "She wants to eat you."

The boy looked at him for a moment and said nothing. But Macalister thought he detected a slow darkening, a dawning of intelligence as he lowered his eyes.

For some reason an image of his mother leapt to Macalister's mind. It came out of the long past and he saw the sad, tired eyes, the slow smile on the leathery, wrinkled face as she bent over the little boy, listening to his prattle.

Of course, thought Macalister, it had always been Larry. Nothing had been too good for Larry, it was always Larry's hand she had held as they had gone through the orchard, looking for early pink-eyes in the grass. Well, Larry was a man now, and the orchard was a dry tract in the dust, with the wind blowing the grass seeds over it. He wasn't his brother's keeper.

"Go to it, Larry," he shouted as the boy walked off ahead. "Wish I had half your luck!"

He waited for Cohn and his wife to catch up with him. They scrambled back together, down to the flat rock by the pool where the dragon-flies darted over the brown surface of the water. Sonia flung herself down on the sun-warmed rock.

"I'm tired," she said.

"Me, too," said Cohn. "I wouldn't mind getting in the pool to freshen up a bit."

"I'm going in," said Larry, and he rolled up his trouser legs and stripped off his shirt.

"Take it all off and go in beyond the bend," called Macalister.

The boy disappeared round the rocks and Sonia heard the faint sounds of splashing through the trees.

Unbidden, her mind went back to him, to his young slim nakedness now in the dark water, and the mysterious potency of his young thin boy's flanks. It was warm on the flat rock, and in the warmth the pores of her mind seemed to coarsen, to admit images that were frankly sexual. Why all the fuss, a voice seemed to say; what is a boy's virginity? What makes you think this is any different?

Macalister came and lay beside her, his face close to her.

"Larry's a fine boy," he said. "He wants taking in hand."

She turned sharply and looked at him. He returned the look boldly. "The boy has talent," he said 'A woman like you could do a lot for him."

"What was that?" said Cohn.

"We were talking about Larry," she said.

"He'll be sorry to see this place go," said Macalister. "He's gun-crazy, he wants to come up here shooting."

"He can still come if he likes," said Cohn amiably.

"Has he got a gun?" asked Sonia.

"Got his heart set on one," said Macalister. "A .22 repeater. I believe he'd sell his soul for a good rifle."

Cohn stretched and got himself up. "Better be getting back, I suppose," he said. "We can fix up the details at the car. You coming, Sonia?"

"Mrs. Cohn had better wait for Larry," said Macalister. "He can give her a hand. We'll get back faster alone." He went some distance before calling back, "Come along out, Larry. We're going back." He moved off quickly then and Cohn followed him.

Larry came out of the bushes, flinging water from his hair. Sonia went down to meet him.

"We're going to buy the place," she said. "Do you mind very much?"

"I don't mind," said the boy. "But I would have liked to come here shooting."

"You can still come," she said. "My husband said so. Have you got a gun?"

"No," he said sullenly. "I borrow one sometimes."

"I know a man who sells guns," said Sonia, "very good guns."

"I'd like a good repeater," said the boy.

She heard the interest creeping into his voice, and moved closer to him. "I'll buy you a gun," she said softly. "We'll come here, and you can shoot the lyre-bird, if you're nice to me."

In the distance they heard Macalister's voice, laughing.

★ ★ ★

CHINESE BANDIT?

Title: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (*Lewis Carroll*).

Banned: 1931, China. Banned by the Governor of Hunan Province on the ground that "Animals should not use human language, and that it was disastrous to put animals and human beings on the same level."

ANNE LYON HAIGHT, *Banned Books*

Office Hours

I love Saturday, I love Sunday,
But how could anyone ever love Monday?

OGDEN NASH

His paper propped against the electric toaster
(Nicely adjusted to his morning use),
Daniel at breakfast studies world disaster
And sips his orange juice.
The words dismay him. Headlines shrilly chatter
Of famine, storm, death, pestilence, decay.
Daniel is gloomy, reaching for the butter . . .
Then, having shifted from his human shoulder
The universal woe, he drains his cup,
Rebukes the weather (surely turning colder),
Crumples his napkin up
And, kissing his wife abruptly at the door,
Stamps fiercely off to catch the 8.04.

PHYLLIS MCGINLEY, *Daniel at Breakfast*

Important Appointments

"I am half in love with the typewriter and the telephone. With letters and cables and brief but courteous commands on the telephone to Paris, Berlin, New York. I have fused my many lives into one; I have helped by my assiduity and decision to score those lines on the map there by which the different parts of the world are laced together. I love punctually at ten to come into my room; I love the purple glow of the dark mahogany; I love the table and its sharp edge; and the smooth-running drawers. I love the telephone with its lip stretched to my whisper, and the date on the wall; and the engagement book. Mr. Prentice at four; Mr. Eyres sharp at four-thirty.

"I like to be asked to come to Mr. Burchard's private room and report on our commitments to China. I hope to inherit an arm-chair and a Turkey carpet. My shoulder is to the wheel; I roll the dark before me, spreading commerce where there was chaos in the far parts of the world. If I press on, from chaos making order, I shall find myself where Chatham stood, and Pitt, Burke, and Sir Robert Peel."

VIRGINIA WOOLF, *The Waves*

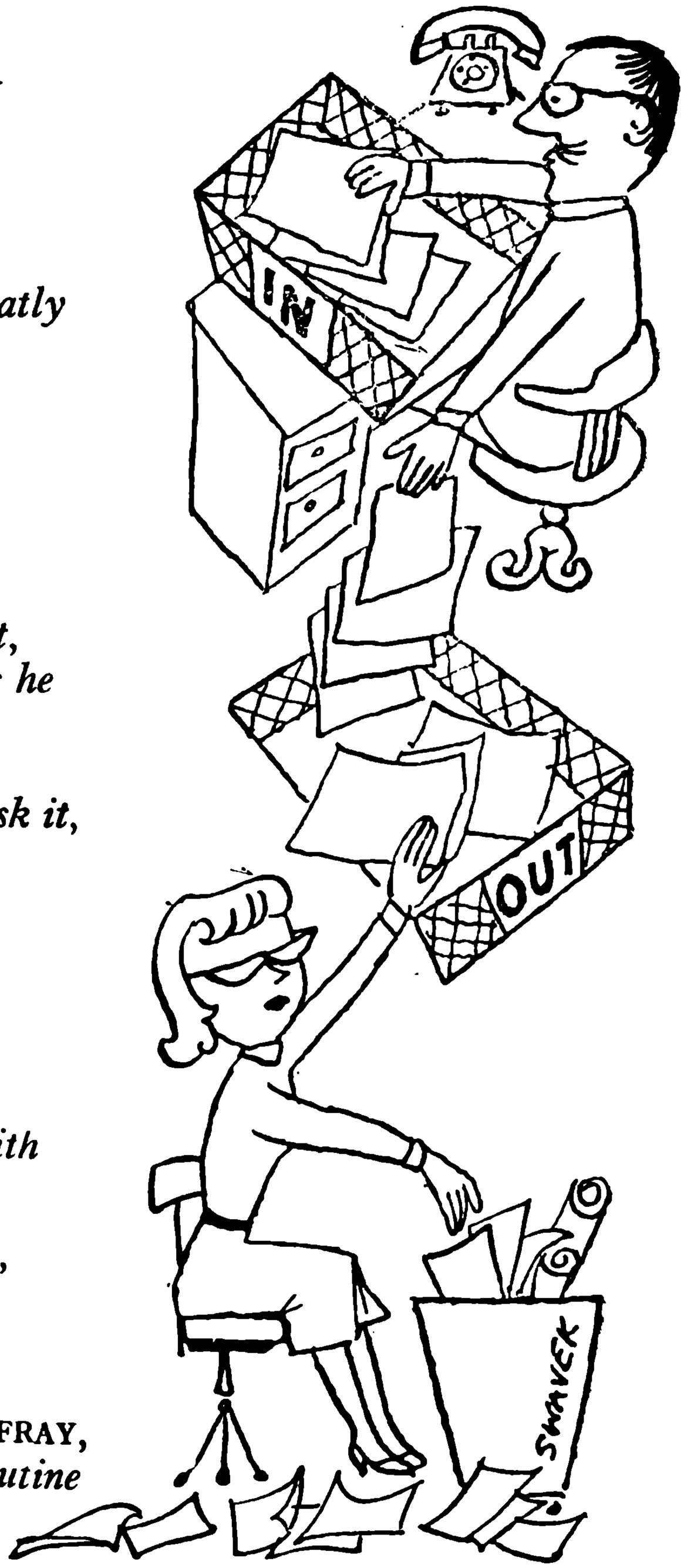
Basket Work

Miss McCaskett
Gathered the mail—
The checks, the orders,
The bills of sale,
The ads and circulars
By the bale—
And placed them as neatly
As one could ask it
In Mr. Federber's
IN basket.

Mr. Federber
Examined the lot;
Kept the ones
He was glad he'd got,
And dumped the others he
Wished he'd not,
With a yawn so wide
That he couldn't mask it,
In Mr. Federber's
OUT basket.

And Miss McCaskett
Gathered the pile,
And setting aside
The ones to file,
She dumped the rest with
A tired smile,
Tonelessly humming
"A tisket, a tasket,"
In Miss McCaskett's
Wastebasket.

NORMAN R. JAFFRAY,
Routine



All-Round Type

A modern executive is a man who talks golf around the office all morning and business around the golf course all afternoon.

DAN BENNETT

Secretarial Vacancy

After the brief bivouac of Sunday,
their eyes, in the forced march of Monday to Saturday,
hoist the white flag, flutter in the snow storm of paper,
haul it down and crack in the midsun of temper.

In the pause between the first draft and the carbon
they glimpse the smooth hours when they were children—
the ride in the ice-cart, the ice-man's name,
the end of the route and the long walk home . . .

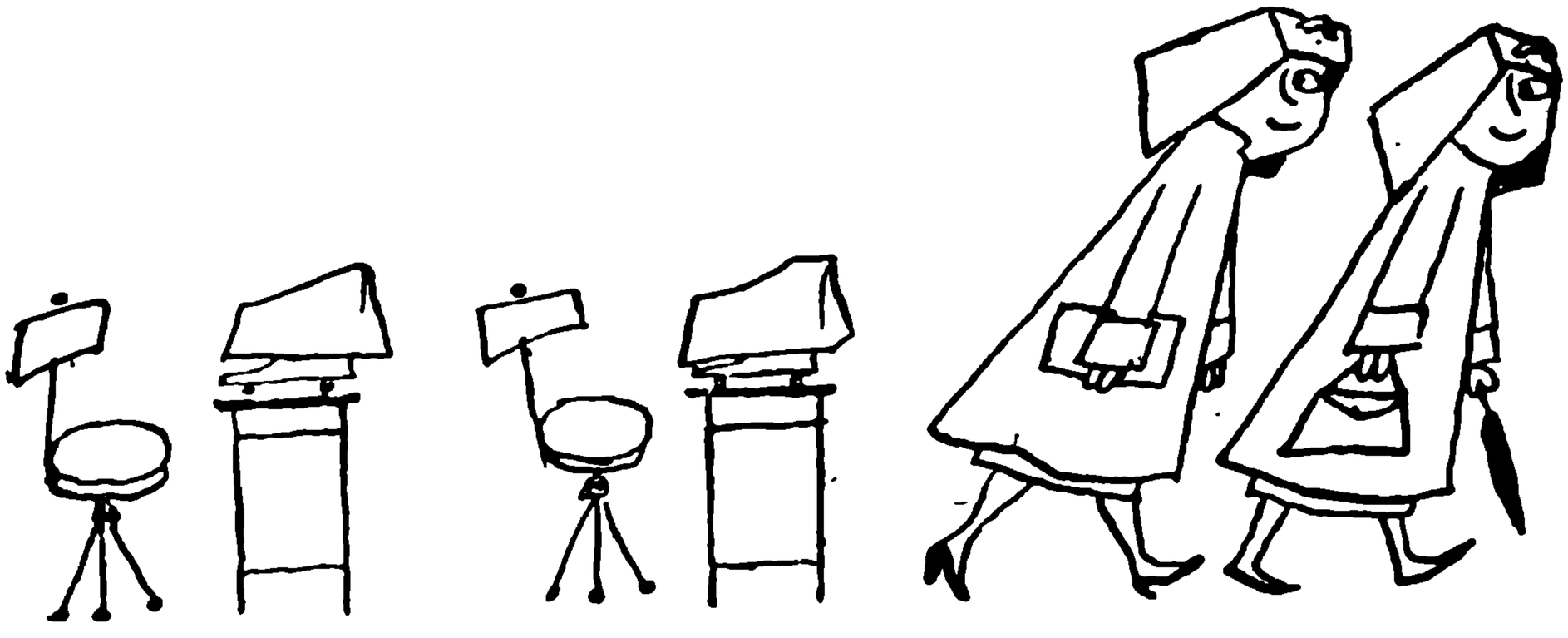
Their beds are their oceans—salt water of weeping
the waves that they know—the tide before sleep;
and fighting to drown they assemble their sheep
in columns and watch them leap desks for their fences
and stare at them with their own mirror-worn faces.

P. K. PAGE,
The Stenographers

Yours Faithfully

I read about the guts of the pioneer woman and the woman of the dust-bowl and the gingham goddess of the covered wagon. What about the woman of the covered typewriter?

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY,
Kitty Foyle



STRANGE CARNIVAL

In the light of a match I saw
two red-and-green eyes watching me

BY GERALD KERSH

WE are a queer people: I do not know what to make of us. Whatever anyone says for us is right; whatever anyone says against us is right. A conservative people, we would turn out our pockets for a rebel; and prim as we are, we love an eccentric.

We are an eccentric people. For example, we make a cult of cold baths—and of our lack of plumbing—and a boast of such characters as Dirty Dick of Bishopsgate, and of Mr. Lagg who is landlord of The White Swan at Wettendene.

Dirty Dick of Bishopsgate had a public house, and was a dandy, once upon a time. But it seems that on the eve of his marriage to a girl with whom he was in love she died, with the wedding-breakfast on the table. Thereafter, everything had, by his order, to be left exactly as it was on that fatal morning. The great cake crumbled, the linen mouldered, the silver turned black. The bar became filthy. His house became a byword for neglect . . . whereupon, he did good business there, and died rich.

Mr. Lagg, who had a public house in Wettendene, which is in Sussex, seeing The Green Man, redecorated and furnished with chromium chairs, capturing the carriage-trade, was at first discouraged. His house, The White Swan, attracted the local men who drank nothing but beer—on the profit of which at that time a publican could scarcely live.

Lagg grew depressed; neglected the house. Spiders spun their webs in the cellar, above and around the empty, mouldering barrels, hogsheads, kilderkins, nipperkins, casks, and pins. He set up a bar in this odorous place—and so made his fortune.

As the dirtiest place in Sussex, it became a meeting-place for people who bathed every day. An American from New Orleans started the practice of pinning visiting-cards to the beams. Soon, everybody who had a card pinned it up, so that Lagg's cellar was covered with them. —

I visited The White Swan, in passing, on holiday. The people in Wettendene called it—not without affection—The Mucky Duck. There was the usual vociferous gathering of long-toothed women in tight-cut tweeds, and ruddy men with two slits to their jackets, howling confidences, while old Lagg, looking like a half-peeled beetroot, brooded under the cobwebs.

He took notice of me when I offered him something to drink, and said, " Stopping in Wettendene, sir? "

" Overnight," I said. " Anything doing? "

He did not care. " There's the flower show," he said, flapping about with a loose hand. " There's the Christian Boys' sports. All pinned up. Have a dekko. See for yourself."

So I looked about me.

That gentleman from New Orleans, who had pinned up the first card on the lowest beam, had started a kind of chain reaction. On the beams, the ceiling, and the very barrels, card jostled card, and advertisement advertisement. The belly of a stuffed trout was covered with cards as an autumn valley with leaves.

The great hogshead, it seemed, was set aside for the bills advertising local attractions. Many of these were out of date—for example, an advertisement of a baby show in 1932, and another of a cricket match in 1934. As Mr. Lagg had informed me, there were the printed announcements of the Christian Boys' affair, and the flower show.

Under the flower show, which was scheduled for August 14th, was pinned a wretched little bill advertising for the same date a Grand Carnival in Wagnall's Barn on Long Meadow, Wettendene. Everything was covered with dust.

The " Grand Carnival " was to begin at seven o'clock; entrance fee, sixpence, children half price. It could not be much of a show, I reflected, at that price and in that place. But I like carnivals and am interested in the people that follow them; so I set off at five o'clock.

Long Meadow is not hard to find: you go to the end of Wettendene High Street, turn sharp right at Scott's Corner where the village ends, and take the winding lane, Wettendene Way. This will lead you through a green tunnel to Long Meadow, where Wagnall's big Barn is.

Long Meadow, which was rich grazing-land in better times, is good for nothing much at present, but the Barn stands firm and four-square to the capricious rains and insidious fogs of Wettendene Marsh, incongruously sturdy in that wasteland. It is a long time since any produce was stocked in Wagnall's Barn. Mr. Etheridge, who owns it, rents it for dances, amateur theatrical shows, and what not.

That playbill had aroused my curiosity. It was boldly printed in red, as follows:

JOLLY JUMBO'S CARNIVAL
COME AND SEE THE ONE AND ONLY
GORGON
The Man who Eats Bricks & Swallows Glass
•
THE HUMAN SKELETON
THE INDIA-RUBBER BEAUTY
With her Legs around her Neck she Walks on her Hands
A LIVE MERMAID
•
ALPHA, BETA, AND DOT
The World-Famous Tumblers with the Educated Dog
JOLLY JUMBO'S CARNIVAL

I left early, because I like to look behind the scenes, and have a chat with a wandering freak or two. I "tasted sawdust," as the saying goes, and had a yearning to sit on the ground and hear strange stories. Not that I expected much of Wettendene. All the same, the strangest people turn up in the unlikeliest places . . .

Then the rain came down, as it does in an English summer. The sky sagged, rumbled a borborygmic threat of thunderstorms which seemed to tear open clouds like bags of water. I had come prepared with a mackintosh, which I put on as I ran for the shelter of the barn.

I was surprised to find it empty. The thunder was loud now, and there were zigzags of lightning in the east, while the pelting rain on the meadow sounded like maracas. I took off my raincoat and lit a cigarette—and then, in the light of the match-flame, I caught a glimpse of two red-and-green eyes watching me, in a far corner, about a foot from the floor.

It was not yet night but I felt in that moment such a pang of horror as comes only in the dark; but I am so constituted that, when frightened, I run forward. There was something unholy about Wagnall's Barn, but I should have been ashamed not to face it, whatever it might be. So I advanced, with my walking-stick; but then there came a most melancholy whimper, and I knew that the eyes belonged to a dog.

I made a caressing noise and said, "Good dog, good doggie! Come on, doggo!"—feeling grateful for his company. By the light of another match, I saw a grey poodle, neatly clipped in the French style. When he saw me, he stood up on his hind legs and danced.

In the light of that same match I saw also a man squatting on

his haunches with his head in his hands. He was dressed only in trousers and a tattered shirt. Beside him lay a girl. He had made a bed for her of his clothes and, the rain falling softer, I could hear her breathing, harsh and laborious.

The clouds lifted. A little light came into the barn. The dog danced, barking, and the man awoke, raising a haggard face.

"Thank God you've come," he said. "She can't breathe. She's got an awful pain in the chest, and a cough. She can't get her breath, and she's burning. Help her, doctor—Jolly Jumbo has left us high and dry."

"What?" I said. "Went on and left you here, all alone?"

"Quite right, doctor."

I said, "I'm not a doctor."

"Jumbo promised to send a doctor from the village," the man said, with a laugh more unhappy than tears. "Jolly Jumbo promised! I might have known. I did know. Jolly Jumbo never has kept his word. Jumbo lives for hisself. But he didn't ought to leave us here in the rain, and Dolores in a bad fever. No, nobody's got the right. No!"

I said, "You might have run for the doctor yourself."

"'Might' is a long word, mister. I've broke my ankle and my left wrist. Look at the mud on me, and see if I haven't tried . . Third time, working my way on my elbows—and I'm an agile man—I fainted with the pain, and half drowned in the mud . . But Jumbo swore his Bible oath to send a physician for Dolores. Oh dear me!"

At this the woman, between short, agonized coughs, gasped, "*Alma de mi corazón*—heart of my soul—not leave? So cold, so hot, so cold. Please, not go?"

"I'll see myself damned first," the man said, "and so will Dot. Eh, Dot?"

At this the poodle barked and stood on its hind legs, dancing.

The man said drearily, "She's a woman, you see, sir. But one of the faithful kind. She come out of Mexico. That *alma de mi corazón*—she means it. Actually, it means 'soul of my heart' . . . There's nothing much more you can say to somebody you love, if you mean it . . . So you're not a doctor? More's the pity! I'd hoped you was. But, oh sir, for the sake of Christian charity, perhaps you'll give us a hand.

"She and me, we're not one of that rabble of layabouts, and gippos, and what not. Believe me, sir, we're artists of our kind. I know that a gentleman like you doesn't regard us, because we live rough. But it would be an act of kindness for you to get a doctor up from Wettendene, because my wife is burning and coughing, and I'm helpless . . "

The girl, gripping his wrist, sighed, " Please, not to go, not to leave? "

" Set your heart at ease, sweetheart," the man said. " Me and Dot, we are with you. And here's a gentleman who'll get us a physician. Because, to deal plainly with you, my one and only, I've got a bad leg now and a bad arm, and I can't make it through the mud to Wettendene. The dog tried and she come back with a bloody mouth where somebody kicked her . . . "

I said, " Come on, my friends, don't lose heart. I'll run down to Wettendene and get an ambulance, or at least a doctor. Meanwhile," I said, taking off my jacket, " peel off some of those damp clothes. Put this on her. At least it's dry. Then I'll run down and get you some help."

He said, " All alone? It's a dretful thing, to be all alone. Dot'll go with you, if you will, God love you! But it's no use, I'm afraid."

He said this in a whisper, but the girl heard him, and said, quite clearly, " No use. Let him not go. Kind voice. Talk— " This between rattling gasps.

He said, " All right, my sweet, he'll go in a minute."

The girl said, " Only a minute. Cold. Lonely— "

" What, Dolores, lonely with me and Dot? "

" Lonely, lonely, lonely."

So the man forced himself to talk. God grant that no circumstances may compel any of you who read this to talk in such a voice. He was trying to speak evenly; but from time to time, when some word touched his heart, his voice broke like a boy's, and he tried to cover the break with a laugh that went inward, a sobbing laugh.

Holding the girl's hand and talking for her comfort, interrupted from time to time by the whimpering of the poodle Dot, he went on.

•

They call me Alpha, you see, because my girl's name is Beta. That is her real name, short for Beatriz Dolores. But my real name is Alfred, and I come from Hampshire.

They call us " tumblers," sir, but Dolores is an artist. I can do the forward rolls and the triple back-somersaults; but Dolores is the genius. Dolores, and that dog Dot, do you see?

It's a hard life, sir, and it's a rough life. I used to be a joey—a kind of a clown—until I met Dolores in Southampton, where she'd been abandoned by a dago that ran a puppet act, with side-shows, and went broke and left Dolores high and dry.

I dare say you've heard of my act, Alpha, Beta, and Dot? . . . Oh, a stranger here, are you, sir? I wish you could have seen it.

•

Of course, I'm only the bearer. I would come rolling and somersaulting in, and stand. Then Dolores'd come dancing in and take what looked like a standing jump—I gave her a hand-up —onto my shoulders, so we stood balanced. Then, in comes poor little Dot, and jumps; first onto my shoulder, then onto Dolores's shoulder from mine, and so onto Dolores's head where Dot stands on her hind legs and dances . . .

The rain comes down, sir. Dolores has got a cold in the chest. I beg her, " Don't go on, Dolores, don't do it." But nothing will satisfy her, `bless her heart: the show must go on. And when we come on, she was burning like a fire. Couldn't do the jump. I twist sidewise to take the weight, but she's kind of a deadweight, poor girl! My ankle snaps, and we tumbles.

Tried to make it part of the act—making funny business, carrying the girl in my arms, hopping on one foot, with good old Dot dancing after us.

That was the end of us in Wettendene. Jolly Jumbo says to us, " Never was such luck. The brick-eater's bust a tooth. The mermaid's good and dead. The strong-man has strained hisself. But I've got to leave you to it, Alph, old feller. I'm off to Portsmouth."

I said, " And what about my girl? I've only got one hand and one foot, and she has a fever."

He said, " Wait a bit, Alph, just wait a bit. My word of honour, and my Bible oath, I'll send a sawbones up from Wettendene."

" And what about our pay? " I ask.

Jolly Jumbo says, " I swear on my mother's grave, Alph, I haven't got it. But I'll have it in Portsmouth, on my Bible oath. You know me. Sacred word of honour! In the meantime, Alph, I'll look after Dot for you."

And so he picked up the dog—I hadn't the strength to prevent him—and went out, and I heard the whips cracking and the vans squelching in the mud.

But little Dot got away and come back . . .

I've been talking too much, sir. I thought you was the doctor. Get one for the girl, if you've a heart in you—and a bit of meat for the dog. I've got a few shillings on me . . .

I said, " Keep still. I'll be right back." And I ran in the rain, closely followed by the dog Dot, down through that dripping green tunnel into Wettendene, and rang long and loud at a black door to which was affixed the brass plate, well worn, of one Dr. MacVitie, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.

The old doctor came out, brushing crumbs from his waistcoat.

There was an air of decrepitude about him. He led me into his surgery. I saw a dusty old copy of Gray's *Anatomy*, two fishing-rods, four volumes of the Badminton Library—all unused these past twenty years. There were also some glass-stoppered bottles that seemed to contain nothing but sediment; a spirit-lamp without spirit; some cracked test-tubes; and an ancient casebook into the cover of which was stuck a rusty scalpel.

He was one of the cantankerous old Scots school that seems incapable of graciousness and grudging even of a civil word.

He growled, " I'm in luck this evening. It's six months since I sat down to my bit of dinner without the bell going before I had the first spoonful of soup halfway to my mouth. Well, you've let me finish my evening meal. Thank ye."

He was ponderously ironic, this side offensiveness. " Well, out with it. What ails ye? Nothing, I'll wager. Nothing ever ails 'em hereabouts that a dose of castor oil or an aspirin tablet won't cure—excepting always rheumatism. Speak up, man! "

I said, " There's nothing wrong with me at all. I've come to fetch you to treat two other people up at Wagnall's Barn. There's a man with a broken ankle and a girl with a congestion of the lungs. So get your bag and come along."

He snapped at me like a turtle, and said, " And who are you to be giving a name to symptoms? In any case, young fellow, I'm not practising. I'm retired. My son runs the practice, and he's out on a childbed case. Damn that dog—he's barking again! "

The poodle was indeed barking hysterically and scratching at the front door.

I said, " Doctor, these poor people are in desperate straits."

" Ay, poor people always are. And who's to pay the bill? "

" I'll pay," I said, taking out my wallet.

" Put it away, man, put it away! Put your hand in your pocket for all the riff-raff that lie about in barns and ye'll end in the workhouse."

He got up laboriously, sighing, " Alex is over Iddlesworth way with the car. God give us strength to bear it. I swore my oath and so I'm bound to come, Lord preserve us! "

" If," I said, " if you happen to have a bit of meat in the house for the dog, I'd be glad to pay for it."

" And what do ye take this surgery for? A butcher's shop? " Then he paused. " What sort of a dog, as a matter of curiosity, would ye say it was? "

" A little grey French poodle."

" Oh ay? Very odd. Ah well, there's a bit of meat on the chop bones, so I'll put 'em in my pocket for the dog, if ye like . . .

Wagnall's Barn, did ye say? A man and a girl, is that it? They'll be some kind of vagrant romanies, or gippos, no doubt?"

I said, "I believe they are some kind of travelling performers. They are desperately in need of help. Please hurry, doctor."

His face was sour and his voice harsh, but his eyes were bewildered, as he said, "Ay, no doubt. A congestion of the lungs, ye said? And a fractured ankle, is that it? Very well." He was throwing drugs and bandages into his disreputable-looking black bag. I helped him into his immense black mackintosh.

He said, "As for hurrying, young man, I'm seventy-seven years old, my arteries are hard, and I couldn't hurry myself for the crack of doom. Here, carry the bag. Hand me my hat and my stick, and we'll walk up to Wagnall's Barn on this fool's errand of yours. Because a fool's errand it is, I fancy. Come on."

The little dog, Dot, looking like a bit of the mud made animate, only half distinguishable in the near dark, barked with joy, running a little way backwards and a long way forwards, leading us back to the Barn through that darkened green tunnel.

The doctor had a flash-lamp. We made our way to the barn, he grumbling and panting and cursing the weather. We went in. He swung the beam of his lamp from corner to corner, until it came to rest on my jacket.

It lay as I had wrapped it over poor Dolores, but it was empty.

I shouted, "Alpha, Beta! Here's the doctor!"

The echo answered, "*Octor!*"

I could only pick up my jacket and say, "They must have gone away."

Dr. MacVitie said drily, "Very likely, if they were here at all."

"Here's my jacket, damp on the inside and dry on the outside," I said. "And I have the evidence of my own eyes—"

"No doubt. Very likely. In a lifetime of practice I have learnt, sir, to discredit the evidence of my eyes, and my other four senses besides. Let's away. Come!"

"But where have they gone?" I asked.

"Ah, I wonder!"

"And the dog, where's the dog?" I cried.

He said, in his dour way, "For that, I recommend you consult Mr. Lindsay, the vet."

So we walked down again, without exchanging a word, until we reached Dr. MacVitie's door. Then he said, "Where did you spend your evening?"

I said, "I came straight to the Barn from The White Swan."

"Well, then," he said, "I recommend–ye go back, and take a whisky and water, warm; and get ye to bed in a dry night-

shirt. And this time take a little more wafer with it. Good night to ye." And he slammed the door in my face.

I walked the half mile to The White Swan, which was still open. The landlord, Mr. Lagg, looked me up and down, taking note of my soaking-wet clothes and muddy boots.

I said, "I went up to Wagnall's Barn for Jolly Jumbo's Carnival. But he pulled out, it seems, and left a man, a woman, and a dog— "

"You hear that, George?" said Mr. Lagg to a very old farmer whose knobbed ash walking-stick seemed to have grown out of the knobbed root of his earthy arthritic hand, and who was smoking a pipe mended in three places with insulating tape.

"I heerd," said old George, with a chuckle. "Dat gen'leman'll been a liddle bit late for dat carnival, like."

At this they both laughed. But then Mr. Lagg said soothingly, as to a cash customer, "Didn't you look at the notice on the bill, sir? Jolly Jumbo was here all right, and flitted in a hurry, too. And he did leave a man and a girl—not lawfully married, I heerd—and one o' them liddle shaved French dogs.

"I say, you'm a liddle late for Jolly Jumbo's Carnival, sir. 'Cause if you look again at Jolly Jumbo's bill, you'll see—I think the programme for the cricket match covers up the corner—you'll see the date on it is August the fourteenth, 1904. I was a boy at the time, wasn't I, George?"

"Thirteen year old," old George said, "making you sixty-five to my seventy-two. Dat were a sad business, but as ye sow, so shall ye reap, they says. Live a vagabond, die a vagabond. Live in sin, die in sin— "

"All right, George," said Mr. Lagg, "you're not in chapel now . . . I don't know how you got at it, sir, but Jolly Jumbo lef' two people and a dog behind. Hauled out his vans, eleven o'clock at night, and left word with Dr. MacVitie—the old one, that was—to go up to Wagnall's Barn.

"But he was in the middle o' dinner, and wouldn't go. Then he was called out to the Squire's place, and didn't get home till twelve o'clock next night. And there was a liddle dog that kep' barking and barking, and trying to pull him up the path by the trousis leg. But Dr. MacVitie— "

"Dat were a mean man, dat one, sure enough!"

"You be quiet, George. Dr. MacVitie kicked the liddle dog into the ditch, and unhooked the bell, and tied up the knocker, and went to bed. Couple o' days later, Wagnall, going over his land, has a look at that Barn, and he sees a young girl stone-dead, a young fellow dying, and a poor liddle dog crying fit to break

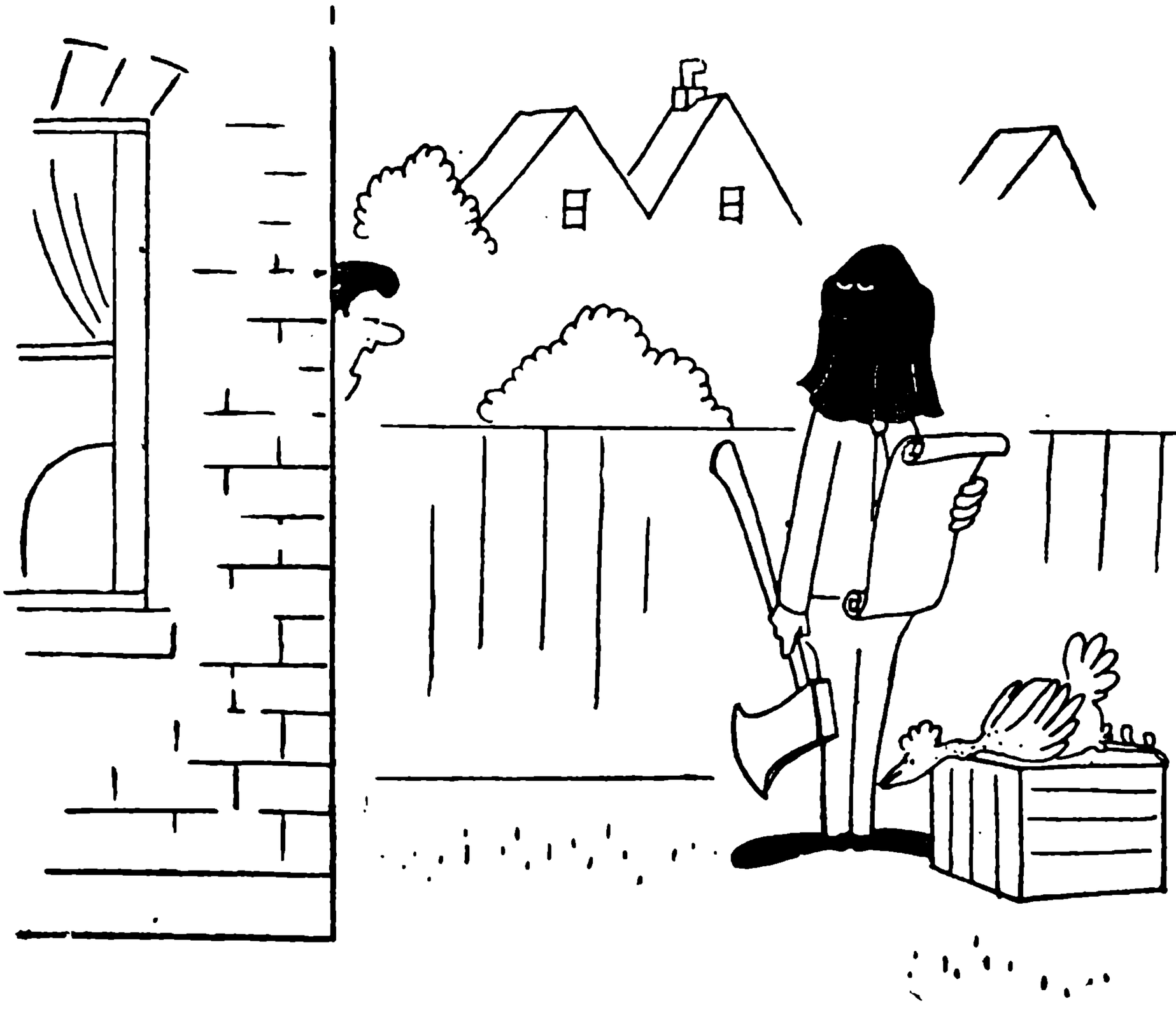
your heart. Oh, he got old Dr. MacVitie up to the barn then, all right, but 'twas too late. The fellow, he died in the Cottage Hospital. They tried to catch the dog, but nobody could. It stood off and on, like, until that pair was buried by the Parish. Then it run off into the woods, and nobody saw it again— "

" Oh, but didn't they, though? " said old George.

Mr. Lagg said, " It's an old wives' tale, sir. They *do* say that this here liddle grey French dog comes back every year on August the fourteenth to scrat and bark at the doctor's door, and lead him to Wagnall's Barn. And be he in the middle of his supper or be he full, be he weary or rested, wet or dry, sick or well, go he must . . . *He* died in 1924, so you see it's nothing but an old wives' tale."

" Dey did used to git light-headed, like, here on the marshes," said old George, " but dey do say old Dr. MacVitie mustn't rest. He mus' pay dat call to dat empty barn, every year, because of his hard heart. Tomorrow, by daylight, look and see if doctor's door ben't all scratted up, like."

" George, you're an old woman in your old age," said Mr. Lagg. " We take no stock of such things in these parts, sir. Would you like to come up to the Lounge and look at the television until closing-time? "



Cut out the dramatics and get on with it !

HUNGRY SAND

Revenge and bloodshed spurred the Arab on

BY GARNETT RADCLIFFE

THE Audhali Arabs living on Muskel Island off the Oman coast had nicknamed it The-Lizard-Who-Breathes-Death, but technically it was a Dragonfly Mark IV tank carrying quick-firing stabilized cannons and V.G.O. machine-guns in a revolving turret. It was a wonderful death machine that had cost the British taxpayers three hundred thousand rupees, but even so an economic expert at Aden had reckoned that sending it to police Muskel Island would ultimately prove a good investment.

" She can do the work of a battalion of infantry at a fraction of the cost," he had assured a doubting general. " On the Island she will be like a battleship ready to sail anywhere trouble threatens. The mere threat of her presence will make the Audhalis be good boys."

In answer to which the general had growled, " I doubt if fifty tanks could make Gul Haithan be a good boy. But anyway we'll see."

By Gul Haithan he had meant the eldest son of the Emir of Muskel, a young firebrand diversely known to the Audhalis as The-Hater-of-the-British, and He-Who-Knows-No-Fear.

Gul Haithan was proud of both nicknames. He saw them as medals which he wore in his heart, and they were glowing very brightly when, crouched behind a rock overlooking a valley, he watched The-Lizard-Who-Breathes-Death carrying out target practice.

The tank was an awesome spectacle. With roaring motors it crashed along a hillside at an impossible angle, then it swung right-handed and thundered up the hill until it seemed a miracle it didn't topple backwards, while the machine-guns poured a shattering storm of nickel into a cave supposed to be an enemy stronghold. Then, while Gul Haithan watched, it wheeled faster than a horse and plunged down a sheer decline, flattening trees and roaring through undergrowth like a mad rhinoceros.

The valley echoed with its smoke and thunder. Gul Haithan, his eyes blazing with baffled hatred, snaked down into a dip where he had tethered his racing camel, Sheba. She was *his* tank.

Sheba carried no cannon; Sheba had a hump instead of a revolving turret, but he loved her. She was a great-hearted beast, battle-tested, without fear, and his friend.

As he mounted, he spoke: "Rise, Queen of my Heart. The British apes are below, hiding from the wrath of Gul Haithan in a lizard fashioned of steel. Rise, my Queen, and let us show them how an Audhali warrior can ride and shoot."

Rage had made him reckless. He trotted to the hilltop where he could see the enemy. The tank had ceased firing and was squatting among the rocks at the bottom of the valley. The crew had come out for a breather. Red-skinned young men in shorts and berets, they were smoking cigarettes and brewing tea.

"Behold, the apes have descended to the ground!" Gul Haithan sneered to his camel. "Charge, in the name of Allah!"

Sheba came into the valley silent and swift like the shadow of death. The first warning the crew got was when they heard the crack of Gul Haithan's rifle and heard his yell: "*Ulla* . . . *Ulla* . . . *Ulla* . . . Death to the Unbelievers . . . Taste the bullets of an Audhali, you white-skinned apes . . ."

They fled ignominiously into and under the tank. Gul Haithan circled them, yelling and firing like a cowboy. Then he galloped on and swung up a gulley. Behind him a Vickers chattered vindictively and he laughed as he heard the ping of the futile bullets.

It would have been death or, worse still, capture, to have remained in the vicinity of the tank. For two days and a night he fled across the Island, using camel tracks across the hills.

From Jibel Sharbi he rode to Fa'lanj, then he turned north and struck the Wadi Hahari, a dried-up river-bed leading to the sea. His hope was to find a fishing-dhow that would ferry him to the mainland. There he meant to rouse the Audhali tribesmen, raise an army, and raid the fat oil fields at Serracon. He rode on a mission of revenge and bloodshed.

At dawn on the third day he came in sight of the sea. He looked down on a cove where the sand glittered like sugar in the rays of the rising sun. Birds sang and there were butterflies and myriads of bright-hued little crabs racing on the sand. After the savage hills of the interior the place seemed a garden of peace and beauty.

"Allah has rewarded our piety by guiding us to Paradise," Gul Haithan told Sheba. "Here we will bathe and rest until a dhow comes."

He rode down to the beach, stripped off his clothes, and laid his precious sword and rifle on a rock. Then he led the protesting camel into the warm, clear water. It would soothe her tired limbs and drown the camel lice that infested her hide.

The water was shallow near the beach. When they were some way out he coaxed her to kneel down, and her snarls changed to grunts of pleasure. Gul Haithan poured water over her head and back with his cupped hands.

The tide was coming in. The little waves creamed round Sheba as if she were a rock, and inquisitive fish darted round Gul Haithan's legs. He looked down, and he suddenly realized that he had sunk into the sand almost to his knees. When he tried to lift a foot it felt as if it were held by a cold, soft hand. He tried harder, and the other foot sank as if into mud.

He knew then he had strayed into great danger. He was on what the Fadli fishermen called hungry sand, sand that quickened into life with the coming of the tide and swallowed everything it touched. Now he knew why the cove was so quiet and deserted.

He shouted to Sheba, and the urgency of his voice made her obey at once. With a great heave and much splashing she half rose, then she seemed to topple forward. Her neck was extended and she uttered cries of rage and terror.

Gul Haithan put his hands on her hump and with a great effort pulled his legs clear. The water was deep enough to allow him to swim. There was a chance he might save his life, and he struck out for shore.

The cries of the camel made him pause. Was he a camel louse to swim away and desert his friend? Was he an Audhali warrior or a rat?

Curbing his own foolishness, he swam back, struck Sheba with his hand, and urged her as he had oft-times urged her into battle: "Rise, my Queen . . . *Ulla—Ulla—Ulla*, the enemy are ahead and we must gallop faster than their bullets . . . Rise, Mighty One, and I will reward you with a golden collar."

His voice roused the camel as nothing else could have done. With tremendous plunges she began to fight towards the land. He fought beside her, dragging, pushing, and yelling like a madman. He fought the sand as he would have fought his enemy.

"Charge, Daughter of the Sun! Only a few paces more and you will be safe . . . *Ulla* . . . *Ulla* . . . *Ulla* . . . In the name of the Prophet, *charge*! *Ulla* . . . *Ulla* . . . *Ulla* . . ."

But Sheba could do no more. She relaxed, and her head would have gone under water had not Gul Haithan supported it. He stood beside her and let his legs sink into the cold, deathlike embrace of the hungry sand.

Again silence, broken only by the cries of the birds, fell upon the cove. He raised his face to feel the warmth of the sun. It would be cold down there—cold, and there would be no light.

The cove shone with a fearful beauty. Cliffs, the sand, the

blue sea, and the waves were a vivid, unreal picture soon to fade for ever. He was not afraid, but he prayed to Allah to send death quickly. But Allah sent what was worse than death.

A great dark green crab thundered from the shadow of a distant cliff. A wave broke over Gul Haithan's head. He was blinded, and there was a terrible confused roaring in his ears.

The roaring increased; then he realized the crab was rushing towards him through the shallow water. No, it was The-Lizard-Who-Breathes-Death. His enemy had come to gloat on his death agony! He cried out, but another wave drowned his voice. Choking and blinded, he clawed for air.

Suddenly there were men round him, red-skinned men in shorts who swore and shouted as they fought through the water. Strong hands grasped him; he was dragged along a human chain until he lay upon firm sand. After an interval he shook the water from his eyes, rose, and stared.

Allah had driven the Infidels mad! They were still in the sea, fighting terribly in great peril to save Sheba! They had a rope by which they had fastened her to the tank. It was reversing slowly, its engines making a sound like thunder and its tracks hurling up fountains of sand and water as it backed.

Then Sheba was safe! She stood beside him with her legs splayed and her head hanging.

But the battle of the sand still raged, and this battle the sand meant to win. The tank was digging its own grave. There was nothing solid for the spinning tracks to grasp; it was sinking fast. Gul Haithan snatched up his rifle. Allah had delivered his enemies into his hand! The tank was disappearing. The beautiful death machine that had cost three hundred thousand rupees was being engulfed by the victorious sand, and the noise of its motors was only its death cry.

A white man came up to Gul Haithan. He was trying to smile, but his eyes were sad. " You've won, Audhali," he said in Arabic. " We saved your camel, but we have lost our own."

Gul Haithan's answer was to raise his rifle and hurl it in the wake of the tank. His sword and his dagger followed.

As they disappeared he caught the white man's hands and pressed them to his forehead. " You have lost your camel, but you have won the love of an Audhali," he said. " My brother, you and I have no need of weapons! "

★ ★ ★

WORM'S EYE VIEW

Anyone who keeps his ear to the ground has a very narrow vision.

LORD CHERWELL

THE HOT RUN

" Calling all cars —"
Speed blurred the urgent message

BY MICHAEL FOSTER

WALKING slowly along a grey corridor which was dark with years of the city's grime, she heard the evening sounds of police headquarters: the siren growl of a fast car coming in from somewhere, an amiable rumble of cops' voices from the caged-in booking-office around a corner of the corridor, a crazy scream from the receiving hospital four floors above. She walked through the open door of the empty press room and stopped near the *Post-Chronicle* desk. She remembered a young man's battered hat lying there, a cigarette burning down.

Briskly she got out her compact. In its square, expensive mirror she glanced at the weather-touched angle of her soft felt hat, and saw that her lipstick was all right, faintly sketched and smooth. Bitterly—bitter with pride and with hurt—she knew she was far nearer to being beautiful now than when she had been here before.

Fourteen years ago. Then she had been not quite nineteen, just learning to be a good reporter, and that far-away girl had powdered her nose from a fifty-nine-cent compact. The girl's face had been shy and eager, quick to pity, too vulnerable to the human pain that a reporter has to watch. But now, there was the suave modelling and poise that success and pride can give a woman's face.

Pride. She had earned it, and with a lift of the chin she held on to it now, when she thought she needed it most.

The man who once had been night police reporter here was her husband of these fourteen years; and just one month ago, as quietly and gently as he had always lived with her, he had left her. Knowing him, remembering odd little things he had said, she guessed that he had come back this way, silently to disappear into the depths of the city for a while, where they both had been young and poor. Tomorrow she would start looking for him, her experienced mind trying to outguess his; and money could buy a lot of help.

But tonight, somehow, it was enough to have wandered through the dark April weather to this room where they had met so many midnights as boy and girl. Some women could remember a boarding-school, a college, gay young parties. She had this room to remember—this, and the crowded newspaper office uptown where she herself had worked, and the by-ways of the city after nightfall.

With her hands in her pockets she was staring at the grimy walls when a cop passed by in the corridor. He stopped, turned, and came back slowly. He was middle-aged, greying at the temples, with a strong, lined face. And the steadiest eyes she had seen for a long time.

"Why, Julie!" he said. "Julie Randall!"

"Hullo, Al," she said.

His hand, gentle with corded power, enclosed hers for an instant. Then, "Like old times, to see you here again, Julie," he said.

"They were good times," she said softly.

He was looking straight into her eyes. "We often read how well you've been doing," he said, "in Hollywood."

"Well enough," she said. "It's work."

He nodded. "We've been proud of you," he said quietly. He hesitated a moment. "You've grown up, Julie," he said.

"People do."

"But you're . . . different," he said. And in his deep, sad knowledge of people, he seemed to fumble a bit for his words. "I can tell you've won through. That's good. Around here we see so many losers."

In pain she hoped she didn't show, she felt her chin coming up once more in that cool, almost unconscious gesture of pride and of competence. Still looking at her, Al said, "And how's Ed doing these days, Julie my dear?"

She drew a soft careful breath. "I don't know, Al," she said. "In fact, I don't know where he is."

"Oh, now, I'm sorry to hear that," Al said in a deeper voice, roughened by concern. "No serious trouble, I hope?"

"Well no," she said. "Nothing that I can't manage. When the time comes." She felt her lips tightening, and relaxed them in an easy smile.

"Oh," he said.

"How about yourself, Al? What are you doing nowadays?" she asked. His worn old uniform was still that of a patrolman; not even a sergeant's stripes, but he had weathered stars on his sleeve for years of service.

"Still in the fast cars," he said absently. "People still get

into trouble, Julie. Same old routine ways. But—how long have you been back in town?"

"Just since this afternoon. About four o'clock."

"Oh." He hesitated again. Then, "Why not come in the car with us for a while tonight?" he asked. "For old times' sake."

"I'd love to," she said proudly. A reporter had to be trusted and liked, to receive *that* casual invitation.

He smiled. "O.K. Meet us at the foot of the hill, down below. They've been getting kind of sticky about regulations round here lately."

She was waiting in the shadows when the big police car slipped out of traffic and alongside the kerb. The back door swung open and she got in so swiftly that the car barely had to pause. Al was sitting on the right hand side of the front seat with his report board and worksheet on his lap. He kept on writing studiously

After a few moments he said, "Mrs. Randall, I want you to meet Homer Nordstrom."

The big young cop at the wheel politely lifted his new-looking shiny-visored cap clear off his head. His hair was blond and curled crisply, with a sort of homely country look. He glanced quickly round at her, not smiling. He was hardly more than a boy, and he had a good face.

"Homer's been with us just two months, but he'll do, for a rookie," Al said, with a seamed sideways grin and a hand on the boy's shoulder.

Homer's ears turned red with humble pleasure. He edged the police car out of the pouring traffic line and slid it smoothly into a vacant place far ahead. Al lit a pipe, and put up the report board.

When they got back up on the hill, the old part of the town Al took the three-inch, button-operated microphone from its dashboard bracket and, holding it in the cup of his hand, murmured into it—his check-in call, reporting this car back on patrol

A few minutes later, both men became suddenly motionless in the moving car as the small black radio box under the instrument panel said, "Two-A-Fourteen. Two-A-Fourteen. In the alley, at the rear of 763 Wells Street, a prowler, now. A prowler attempting entrance through a window. Code Four. This man is believed to be armed. That is all."

A fine rain, with a little wind, was putting cold haloes around the street lights. Homer had already slammed the car into a fast right turn at a corner, and with a quick reach had flipped two switches on the dashboard. The big flashing red lights on the

top of the car above the windscreen began making eerie reflections on the racing wet hood, and the siren on the right front bumper started its first great running wail.

Al acknowledged into the microphone, and half turned in his seat.

" That's us, Julie. I forgot to tell you our number," he said. " Two-A-Fourteen—Headquarters District, Radio Car Fourteen. Code Four means emergency, use red lights and siren."

" Two-A-Fourteen. Two-A-Fourteen. Change," the radio said. " Change, Two-A-Fourteen. Two-A-Two reports itself in vicinity to the north. Two-A-Two will go Code Four to north end of alley. Two-A-Fourteen, you will go Code Three to south end of alley. Acknowledge, Two-A-Fourteen."

Al acknowledged and turned again. " We go in dark. Code Three means do not use red lights and siren. So Two-A-Two's lights and siren will drive the guy out to us. That's the geography of the alley. It's a steep slope up to us, so the guy will be running slower and may be winded."

Homer had already flipped off the switches into silence and darkness except for the regular headlights. The car scudded down an empty street and then into a bright avenue, and then they swung again into the dimmest street yet. They could hear Two-A-Two's siren coming from a long way off.

A half block more and the car slid silently to the kerb and the two men got out with their revolvers drawn and went into the alley, one on each side, in the darkness under the mouldy brick walls of the old buildings. Julie got out, too, on the street side, and stood watching from around the rear end of the car.

The alley was very steep, with a broken pavement, and almost black. Two-A-Two's siren was coming in fast and suddenly at the bottom end of the alley great red lights blazed. In the rain they made garbage cans and fire-escapes stand out in lurid silhouette.

She could see Al and Homer flattened against their walls, waiting. Around in front of Two-A-Two came two other officers, and flashlights began playing into sunken doorways and up across the fire-escapes. But nothing else moved.

The two pairs of officers worked towards each other, and then all at once everybody was running back downhill and there was a fifth figure, running towards the red lights—a man who had crouched hiding somewhere until Two-A-Two's cops had passed him. So Julie judged he was a professional, a two- or three-time loser who knew about police traps. But his nerve had broken and he had tried too soon to sneak back along a wall and away.

One of the Two-A-Two cops was gaining fast and Julie saw

the dark meaningless figure of crime stop and turn and hold up his hands. She saw Al closing in and Homer stumble with big-footed eagerness, going down on one knee and in a rookie's awkwardness losing his gun. It made a sliding splash into a width of running water among dark rubbish and sand.

And then they were all gathered in the lights of Two-A-Two, a black knot of men, and one of them with the pull-out microphone was reporting that " the suspect is in custody." Just police routine, but Julie knew the set, over-grammatical phrases by which brave men, radio-conscious, report the difference between life and death.

When Al and Homer came walking back up the alley, Homer lagged unobtrusively behind. With large hurried hands he was wiping his revolver with his handkerchief, and looking at it. He tried to slip it back into his holster, but Al said, " Let me see that gun."

Shamefacedly Homer let him have it, and Al took it to the headlights of the car. He broke it open and tried it, bending over and working on it. " You've got sand and dirt in the mechanism," he said. But he finally got the hammer to click emptily several times in a row.

Homer said anxiously, " It's working all right now."

" Yeah," Al said kindly. " But when we take Julie back we'll borrow you another from the property room." He didn't want to make much of it, for Homer's sake. Al was like that. He clicked it some more, hesitated, and then handed it back. Homer shoved it apologetically into his holster.

Al reported the car back in, and again they drove around patrolling that old part of town, not talking much. Some blocks had tough-looking dives, cafés and bars. A nameless show, these night-patched backstreets of life, with sometimes a white lost face glimpsed that would last in the memory.

Julie was remembering a time when she too had been a part of the city and its night. She and a boy—Ed Randall.

She was a general-assignment reporter, working from the newspaper city room uptown, and when she got through work at ten o'clock she would go down to police headquarters to be with him until he got through at two in the morning. It was the only way they could have their evenings together.

Sometimes, two or three cops or a pair of detectives might drift into the press room; she knew most of them, from her own work. Those were good hours, with slow humanity-wise talk, often bitter with the shocks of human grotesquerie, which not even cops ever get fully used to. And Ed's hand would perhaps

reach out to find and hold her own in the drift of tobacco smoke, until she would feel her eyes going suddenly too clear, showing everything she meant, and they would both become aware that the cops were staring earnestly away from them, not to look at a young girl's face so shiningly in love.

After two o'clock they might go down the hill and walk along the waterfront in the night, to end up in an all-night oyster bar where they could hold hands across the table. And as they walked, the ships and the lonely lights made restless golden threads on the black tide—the world was theirs and all its distances, as if nobody else had ever been so young, or loved so much.

One night they had been standing locked in long embrace at the shadowy corner of a pier shed. A car must have crept to a silent stop behind them, because a spotlight was abruptly and searchingly thrown upon them. As they stepped apart and Ed turned swiftly with narrowed eyes into the glare, they heard Al's voice, " Oh. I'm sorry. Hullo there, you kids."

The light was switched off, but Julie and Ed walked over to the car and later on, when the two cops came off duty, they all went to a waterfront hamburger bar for mugs of coffee and a smoke. So, though everyone must have guessed already, Al and his then veteran partner, now retired, had been the first friends they ever really told.

After they were married, and while Ed was serving as a Navy flyer through the war years, Julie went to Los Angeles on a better job.

There, her swift knack of newspaper writing began to harden into sophistication. So pretty soon she was doing a Hollywood news column for her Los Angeles paper, developing her own style, her own approach to the inside story of that astonishing world—and then that fresh viewpoint was abruptly picked up and syndicated for a chain of afternoon papers and that was the big break, and the money.

And the money. It got bigger from there, a lot bigger; even by the time Ed came back from the far Pacific she had a beautiful, expensive apartment. But the night he did get back, lean and tanned and tired, she had to go to a big Hollywood party for a new actress from England. She took Ed along, but he was uncomfortable, courteously puzzled; and maybe that was a symbol of what their new, streamlined life was going to be.

Ed got a job in the publicity department of a studio, and he was a good publicity man, as he had been a good police reporter. In 1950 she bought a house in Beverly Hills; not an especially grand house, but one which made a perfect and very modern setting. At the parties she gave, Ed strolled seriously among the

guests, being a perfect and very modern host for her purposes, but growing somehow more and more quiet as the lines of amusement deepened round his eyes. All the more famous people were always especially cordial to him, her husband; never letting him remember that by Hollywood caste standards, he was merely a workaday-paid publicity man.

As he left his twenties and entered the thirties, he developed a curious quality of remoteness, as if no human passion could ever quite get through his charming and companionable courtesy. Another trouble was that she herself had to be away from home a lot: too many evenings she couldn't even be there for dinner, and she would find him late at night in their library, staring at an open book. Tiredly she would drop onto the leather bench beside his knees, and sometimes he might reach out his hand for hers while they talked; and after a while she would get up and wander out to the kitchen for a glass of milk, and go on up to bed.

And Ed grew more and more silent as time went by. Admittedly, her daily round of famous personalities and forthcoming pictures and new trends and manners and clothes—it was a brittle and sophisticated world. But there was pride, too; pride in her work and in her success and in being important. Remembering how poor they had been, and how young and humble among the nameless of the earth, she brushed aside Ed's hesitant talk about the old newspaper nights. Once he had said: "People should muddy their feet again in the waters of reality." She understood better now that he had left.

She had come back from a flying trip to New York and found him gone. No note or message left, nothing like that. Ed never was much of an explainer, and when he did something he did it quietly. Just his clothes gone, his well-darkened pipes; and she got an odd squeeze of the heart when she saw how little empty space his going had left in the rich closets and chests of that house.

She hadn't realized how simple and how few were the things, the things of this world, that he needed. And she had thought that she herself was one of them. The hardest part to bear was: once she had been.

And now tonight, in Car Fourteen, the police radio was talking to them again from the small black box under the instrument panel: "Two-A-Fourteen. Two-A-Fourteen. A man dead at 812 Kearney Street. 812 Kearney. A man dead, upstairs. See the neighbours. That is all."

Al acknowledged as Homer speeded up, to go Code Four with

lights and siren, clearing the traffic ahead of them. When they got there, Al nodded to Julie and the three of them went in, and up the dim and creaking stairs of a dingy boarding-house. The neighbours were gathered on the upper landing, outside an open door.

It was very simple. An old man was lying dead, fallen partly across the bed. While Homer stood looking official beside the group of white-faced neighbours in the doorway, Al made a fast experienced search of the body and then the room. There was nothing. The old man had simply died. That was all.

Julie leaned one shoulder against the wall, watching, as Al's heavy dark figure bent once more over the body. His big hands mercifully lifted and straightened the legs, put the thin old arms in an attitude of peace and dignity.

There was another siren in the street outside; two of the coroner's men came in briskly with a long wicker basket, and Al turned away. In the doorway a neighbour said, " He was a good old man. Always a cheerful word if you should happen to meet him in the hall, here."

While the coroner's men got to work, Al put on his glasses and studiously made brief notes in his notebook.

Another neighbour said, " He had a good life. He worked hard, and he did good wherever he could."

On the way down the stairs with Al, Homer clomping heavily ahead of them, Julie said, " God, the little things that people say. For comfort. For a bit of remembrance. Among strangers."

Al glanced at her. " Had you forgotten, Julie? " he asked gently.

They got in the car and Al reported into the microphone: " Death at 812 Kearney. Edward C. Carlson, about seventy, a labourer. Apparently natural causes. No suspicious circumstances. The coroner's office is in charge. They will attempt to locate relatives."

They drove around awhile, and their next call was, " Two-A-Fourteen. Two-A-Fourteen. A woman creating a disturbance at 521 Blewett Street. 521 Blewett. A woman is creating a disturbance there. Fourth floor rear. The landlady requests that you enter by the fire-escape, to avoid the property damage of breaking down this woman's door, which is bolted from the inside. The landlady will be waiting in the alley with a ladder to assist you and direct you. That is all."

It was a far more poverty-sodden building than the last one. The landlady waiting in the alley was a hard-faced old biddy. She began talking shrilly: " I don't know anything about her. She just came here two days ago and she don't talk English very

good—" and from high above them in the dark and the rain they heard the woman, and it was pretty awful.

The ladder was propped up to reach the drop-off of the fire-escape, and the harsh old landlady peered sharply at Julie, who began climbing after Al and Homer. When Julie got to the fourth landing Al had already found a window unlocked and was inside, and Homer was clambering in over the sill. Julie climbed in after him.

It was a young woman, maybe even pretty sometimes, and in this room she was giving birth, all alone and in terror. Her dark eyes, swimming for help, looked up and rested upon the heavy, compassionate face of Al bending over her, and she tried to say something but her English words were too broken.

Homer, staring, was getting a strange hard white line around his lips, and Al said sharply, " Unbolt that door and go downstairs and find a phone and turn in a Code Five. For the nearest city ambulance crew. Tell 'em it's an O.B. emergency. Tell 'em to come fast."

But as Homer lurched out shakily, Al turned to Julie with level eyes. " They can't get here in time," he said. " It's up to us, my dear. Are you all right? " And Julie nodded.

In this back room, there were cotton clothes-lines strung sagging from wall to wall, and Al took a blanket and pinned it up for a curtain. He pointed to a gas-ring over a small corner sink and said, " Hot water, Julie. Lots of it. And keep it coming." Then he went behind the blanket, and Julie kicked the door shut against the crowding faces in the hall, and started the water going in some dented pans that she found.

It didn't last long. At one point Julie heard Homer clearing the neighbours and the saw-voiced landlady off the landing and standing guard at the door; and then Al came round the edge of the blanket again and held out a child towards her waiting hands. And Julie washed the child, made him beautiful and wrapped him in a frayed clean teacloth. She went to hand him back to Al, but he shook his head and motioned towards the bed. So it was Julie who laid the baby in the mother's arms. And as the swift wailing alarm of an ambulance siren drew near, and new feet were pounding up the stairs, Julie looked up at Al's face and thought she had never seen a face so strong and so fine with human humbleness.

Afterwards, on the way downstairs, Julie whispered, " The poor and lonely . . ."

Without looking at her, Al said, " Had you forgotten, Julie? "

And Julie slowly bent her head, and they went on out by the back door and got into the car again.

After a time, Al motioned Homer into the kerb, before the brightly lighted steamy window of an all-night snack-bar. He got out of the car and went in, saying nothing. But Julie saw him making a phone call. Al had been phoning home, she thought, to say good night. Most cops on the night patrol find time to do that. Then he put in another call, shorter and curter.

They had driven round for quite a while when the radio talked to them again: " Two-A-Fourteen. Two-A-Fourteen. Q Code. Q Code. That is all."

" That means for us to talk to headquarters by land phone, not over the air," Al explained to Julie, so they pulled into a filling-station and this time Al wasn't long at the phone. He came back to the car looking serious.

" Another headquarters fellow is in kind of trouble," he said. " We'll go and pick him up and get him into the car here and let him ride round with us for a bit. It will do him good. You know, the night air and all."

" Look," Julie said. " I'll get out here and take a taxi back to my hotel, so—"

" No," Al said. " You know us, Julie. You're still like one of us. I saw that a while ago, back yonder. You know how men —yeah, and women, too—well, make their mistakes."

So they drove on to another dark and shabby block, and when the car stopped in front of a cheap saloon, Julie got out and went across the street to be out of the way. From the corners of her eyes she watched Al bringing his friend out of the place, Homer helping. The man's head was down and his feet were only just walking, with the two uniformed cops half carrying him, one on either side. His hat almost fell off once, and Al jammed it back on low over his eye. Methodically, they got him into the back seat of the car.

Slowly, Julie realized that tonight she had seen death and birth and kindness and the routine courage of workaday hearts. And that now she was watching loyalty and tolerance.

When she went back to the car the two men had their friend lying on the back seat. They had covered him with a rough grey police blanket such as all police cars carry for accident cases. Homer clucked disapprovingly, and looked scared. He was a good boy and you could tell that he would make a fine cop some day. Al motioned to Julie and she got into the front seat, next to Homer, and Al slid in beside her.

Then, they heard a terrible flat monotone, suddenly so different, coming from the small black box: " All cars. All cars."

There was a deathly, grating pause. Then the radio said, " All cars, attention. Headquarters District Two. A hold-up

and shooting. Ninth and Chapel at the drugstore in the southwest corner. The proprietor and assistant are down. Shooting is continuing in the street. Two-A-Seven go Code Four."

And Two-A-Fourteen, with its curious freight, was rolling. On a screeching left turn, Al reported, "Two-A-Fourteen at Ninth and Harbour. We are going in."

"Roger, Two-A-Fourteen, you have the hot run. Two-A-Seven your call is now Code Three. Two-A-Fourteen is nearest and going in. All other cars responding, look out for the lights and siren of Two-A-Fourteen."

A speed-blurred intersection whipped by, and the radio spoke again: "All cars on the shooting. An officer is involved and needs help. In the street near the drugstore."

Two more screaming blocks, and the radio said: "On the shooting, all cars. The officer involved is Joe McLarnin and he is dead. Joe is down."

Julie had an instantaneous picture of the silver-bordered glass case affixed to a wall at Headquarters. Inside the case, on old black velvet, were a number of small silver bars, each with a name and a date, and on the top of the frame only the simple inscription: *In the Line of Duty.*

The radio said, "Two-A-Fourteen and all cars. Two suspects in the shooting going west on Chapel now in a cream convertible, licence number five-Norah-three-six-eight-one. They are male, in the twenties, one with black hair, horn-rimmed glasses, one wearing check sports jacket, both slender. They killed an officer. They are still armed." Another pause, and then with quick sharpness: "Two-A-Fourteen, cream convertible seen turning north at high speed on Bayview Boulevard. Coming your way, north on Bayview Boulevard."

Swinging an abrupt corner, they went up on two wheels and Al said quietly, "Two-A-Fourteen will intercept or pursue."

"All cars. All cars. Two-A-Fourteen is in pursuit. Two-A-Fourteen, keep reporting. All others, close in. Close in."

Al said, "Julie. You've got to get out of this car."

But there wasn't time. A cream convertible flashed by on the lighted boulevard half a block ahead of them, and as Julie gave one gasping breath, Homer slammed Two-A-Fourteen into another fierce right turn.

All the traffic was crowding to the kerbs for streets in front of them—except for a fleeting cream car, low and scudding, far ahead. And Al was murmuring into the microphone, reporting street by street. Julie couldn't hear him, but police radio to all cars was not more than five seconds behind: "Two-A-Fourteen is in pursuit. North on Bayview at Maple—North on Bayview

passing Elm—west on Pine—passing Seventh—north on Summit . . ."

Julie knew that from all directions cars were working to points of possible convergence, closing in, closing in, trying to guess ahead of the fleeing car. A twisting, fugitive car, but police radio giving a clear picture of the chase, and road blocks being set and reset as the small black boxes spoke. And all cars trying to work out their ways to meet Two-A-Fourteen.

Al said once, with horror-closed eyes, " Oh, Julie—"

" Never mind," Julie said. " —Watch out! They're going into the kerb! They're abandoning!—"

" We'll get into trouble for this," Homer groaned. " A woman in the car! " He slammed Two-A-Fourteen to a bucking stop. Al had his door open and was piling out with his gun in his hand; Homer got out on his side, and Julie slipped out, too, swinging her feet to the kerb.

It was a dark stretch, with vacant lots and bill-hoardings, and only one street lamp, right above them. Julie was so near to Al that when a dirty orange stab came out of the shadows and Al fell, his heavy shoulder hit hers, knocking her sideways and nearly down. She saw his gun fall inertly into the weeds.

In the full glare of the lights, Homer received two shots, because both gunmen were blasting now. Homer kept trying to work his gun, throwing it, trying to pull the trigger at the two vague figures in the shadows of a road sign. But his gun was jammed. With death in her face, Julie knew—" sand and dirt in the mechanism."

Two more streaks of flame from the road sign. But they were hurried shots, because Homer had thrown his useless gun aside, and with angry tears shining on his gaunt cheeks, he was going in with bare hands. To kill.

Julie, on one knee, groping, had found Al's gun among the wet weeds. Al was up on one knee, too, but Julie was already on her way. With Al's revolver she shot once past Homer, to let him know that help was coming in. One of the half-seen figures whirled and crouched to face her.

And then beside her, strong fingers were on her wrist, a strong hand had taken Al's gun from hers, and an arm had swept her back and downward, out of danger. And Ed was there—her Ed, clear-eyed and grave. He shot once—and then with a few running strides he was into Homer's fight, swinging Al's gun-butt in two short terrible chops. And from all around, the great cars were closing in—all codes forgotten, everybody coming in wide open. On the pavement by the swinging rear door of Two-A-Fourteen, Julie saw a rough grey police blanket lying

thrown aside and crumpled. Dazedly, she realized that Ed had been the man in the back seat.

The fight was over. Ed and Homer stood looking quietly down at the figures who dared not move, even if they could. And Al had hauled himself up by the lamp-post, his right shoulder and arm soaked black.

"Julie," he whispered. And then, a little stronger, "All evening you've been looking for Ed—and looking for yourself, Julie. Without knowing it. You've been finding your way back."

"Yes, Al," she whispered.

"So, when I saw you were still Julie, in spite of all you had done to yourself, I called him on the phone. Remember? Then . . . then I flagged headquarters to give me a Q Call. Purely fake. So's I could pretend to pick him up somewhere, the way we did. Because Ed had come back here to us, too, Julie," Al said. "I kind of rigged it on you, honey. When I told him, we framed it for him to come along and see."

Gently, she touched his blood-soaked sleeve. "Thank you, Al," she said.

The street was filled with cops and lights, and an ambulance was coming. And among a knot of dark uniformed figures, Homer was down, too. But he would be all right. She could tell by the way the others were bending down and kidding him.

He was a fine cop already; and some day he would be as gentle and as wise as Al.

Suddenly, among the crowding men around Al, Ed's voice was close beside her. "—Thought if I came back here, back to our sources, I might see better how to work out our lives. I want to make something real of mine, Julie, and maybe big, and I needed to start among realities again."

She turned to him, her eyes clear.

"We'll work it out, Ed," she said softly. "We'll work it out together. I see better now, too." And the rain was on her shoulders in the night. Al smiled at them, and a wind from the edge of the world touched all their faces.

★ ★ ★

TRESPUSSING!

Eddie Cantor was once appearing at a music hall giving a monologue when a cat walked across the stage and momentarily distracted the attention of the audience. "Go away, go away," Cantor urged the offending animal, "this is a monologue—not a catalogue."

LEWIS BARTON, *Considered Trifles*

CHILL DOWN

No one is bored who is afraid
ELIZABETH COATSWORTH, *The Creaking Stair*

I have got here into a famous old feudal palazzo, on the Arno . . . with dungeons below and cells in the walls, and so full of *ghosts*, that the learned Fletcher (my valet) has begged leave to change his room, and then refused to occupy his *new* room, because there were more ghosts there than in the other. It is quite true that there are most extraordinary noises (as in all old buildings), which have terrified the servants so as to incommode me extremely.

LORD BYRON,
Letter, 4 December, 1821

No Fear!

. . . I'd never quail
At a fine traditional spectre pale,
With a turnip head and a ghostly wail,
And a splash of blood on the dicky!

W. S. GILBERT,
Haunted

Voice from the Churn

In an old farm-house in Yorkshire, where lived an honest farmer named George Gilbertson, a Boggart had taken up his abode. He caused a good deal of trouble, and he kept tormenting the children, day and night, in various ways. Sometimes their bread and butter would be snatched away, or their porringers of bread and milk be capsized by an invisible hand; for the Boggart never let himself be seen . . .

But the gamesome Boggart at length proved such a torment that the farmer and his wife resolved to quit the house and let

YOUR SPINE

him have it all to himself. This settled, the flitting day came, and the farmer and his family were following the last loads of furniture, when a neighbour named John Marshall came up.

"Well, Georgey," said he, "and so you're leaving t'ould hoose at last?"

"Heigh, Johnny, my lad, I'm forced to it; for that bad Boggart torments us so, we can neither rest night nor day for't . . ." He had scarce uttered the words when a voice from a deep upright churn cried out, "Aye, aye, Georgey, we're flitting, ye see!"

"Ods, alive!" cried the farmer, "if I'd known thou would flit too, I'd not have stirred a peg!"

And with that, he turned about to his wife, and told her they might as well stay in the old house, as be bothered by the Boggart in a new one. So stay they did.

ERNEST RHYS, *Fairy-Gold: A Book of Old English Fairy Tales*

Ghost of a Smile

I look in the mirror,
Whose face is there?
It is the face
Of the Ghost of Ware.
This is an old house,
The river flows below placidly,
I am enchanted completely
By this ancient city.
I will never leave you,
Dear town of Ware,
I will look into the mirror
Another afternoon and there
I shall see the smiling face
Of the Ghost of Ware.

STEVIE SMITH, *The Ghost of Ware*

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BIANCA'S HANDS

BY THEODORE STURGEON

BIANCA'S mother was leading her when Ran saw her first. Bianca was squat and small, with dank hair and rotten teeth. Her mouth was crooked and it drooled. Either she was blind or she just didn't care about bumping into things. It didn't really matter because Bianca was an imbecile. Her hands . . .

They were lovely hands, graceful hands, hands soft and smooth and white as snowflakes, hands whose colour was lightly tinged with pink like the glow of Mars on snow. They lay on the counter side by side, looking at Ran. They lay there half closed and crouching, each pulsing with a movement like the panting of a field creature, and they looked. Not watched. Later, they watched him. Now they looked. They did, because Ran felt their united gaze, and his heart beat strongly.

Bianca's mother demanded cheese stridently. Ran brought it to her in his own time while she berated him. She was a bitter woman, as any woman has a right to be who is wife of no man and mother to a monster. Ran gave her the cheese and took her money and never noticed that it was not enough, because of Bianca's hands. When Bianca's mother tried to take one of the hands, it scuttled away from the unwanted touch. It did not lift from the counter, but ran on its fingertips to the edge and leapt into a fold of Bianca's dress. The woman took the unresisting elbow and led Bianca out.

Ran stayed there at the counter unmoving, thinking of Bianca's hands. Ran was strong and bronze and not very clever. He had never been taught about beauty and strangeness, but he did not need that teaching. His shoulders were wide and his arms were heavy and thick, but he had great soft eyes and thick lashes. They

curtained his eyes now. He was seeing Bianca's hands again dreamily. He found it hard to breathe . . .

Harding came back. Harding owned the store. He was a large man whose features barely kept his cheeks apart. He said, "Sweep up, Ran. We're closing early today." Then he went behind the counter, squeezing past Ran.

Ran got the broom and swept slowly.

"A woman bought cheese," he said suddenly. "A poor woman, with very old clothes. She was leading a girl. I can't remember what the girl looked like except—Who was she?"

"I saw them go out," said Harding. "The woman is Bianca's mother, and the girl is Bianca. I don't know their other name. They don't talk to people much. Hurry up, Ran."

Ran did what was necessary and put away his broom. Before he left he asked, "Where do they live, Bianca and her mother?"

"On the other side. A house on no road, away from people. Good night, Ran."

Ran went from the shop directly over to the other side, not waiting for his supper. He found the house easily, for it was away from the road, and stood rudely by itself. The townspeople had cauterized the house by wrapping it in empty fields.

Harshly, "What do you want?" Bianca's mother asked as she opened the door.

"May I come in?"

"What do you want?"

"May I come in?" he asked again. She made as if to slam the door, and then stood aside. "Come."

Ran went in and stood still. Bianca's mother crossed the room and sat under an old lamp, in the shadow. Ran sat opposite her, on a three-legged stool. Bianca was not in the room. The woman tried to speak, but embarrassment clutched at her voice. She withdrew into her bitterness, saying nothing. She kept peeping at Ran, who sat with his arms folded and the uncertain light in his eyes. He knew she would speak soon, and he could wait.

"Ah well . . ." She was silent after that, for a time, but now she had forgiven him his intrusion. Then, "It's a great while since anyone came to see me; a great while . . . It was different before. I was a pretty girl—"

She bit her words off and her face popped out of the shadows, shrivelled and sagging as she leaned forward. Ran saw that she was beaten and cowed and did not want to be laughed at.

"Yes," he said gently. She sighed and leaned back so that her face disappeared again. She said nothing for a moment, sitting looking at Ran, liking him.

"We were happy, the two of us," she mused, "until Bianca

came. He didn't like her, poor thing, he didn't, no more than I do now. He went away. I stayed by her because I was her mother. I'd go away myself, I would, but people know me, and I haven't a penny—not a penny . . . They'd bring me back to her, they would, to care for her. It doesn't matter much now, though, because people don't want me any more than they want her . . ."

Ran shifted his feet uneasily, because the woman was crying. "Have you room for me here?" he asked.

Her head crept out into the light. Ran said swiftly, "I'll give you money each week, and I'll bring my own bed and things." He was afraid she would refuse.

She merged with the shadows again. "If you like," she said, trembling at her good fortune. "Though why you'd want to . . . Still, I guess if I had a little something to cook up nice, and a good reason for it, I could make someone real cosy here. But—*why*?" She rose. Ran crossed the room and pushed her back into the chair. He stood over her, tall.

"I never want you to ask me that," he said, speaking very slowly. "Hear?" She swallowed and nodded. "I'll come back tomorrow with the bed and things," he said.

He left her there under the lamp, blinking out of the dimness, folded round and about with her misery and her wonder.

People talked about it. People said, "Ran has moved to the house of Bianca's mother." "It must be because—" "Ah," said some, "Ran was always a strange boy. It must be because—" "Oh, *no*!" cried others, appalled. "Ran is such a good boy. He wouldn't—"

Harding was told. He frightened the busy little woman who told him. He said, "Ran is very quiet, but he is honest and he does his work. As long as he comes here in the morning and earns his wage, he can do what he wants, where he wants, and it is not my business to stop him." He said this so very sharply that the little woman dared not say anything more.

Ran was very happy, living there. Saying little, he began to learn about Bianca's hands.

He watched Bianca being fed. Her hands would not feed her, the lovely aristocrats. Beautiful parasites they were, taking their animal life from the heavy squat body that carried them, and giving nothing in return. They would lie, one on each side of her plate, pulsing, while Bianca's mother put food into the disinterested, drooling mouth. They were shy, those hands, of Ran's bewitched gaze. Caught out there naked in the light and open of the tabletop, they would creep to the edge and drop out of sight—all but four rosy fingertips clutching the cloth.

They never lifted from a surface. When Bianca walked, her hands did not swing free, but twisted in the fabric of her dress. And when she approached a table or the mantelpiece and stood, her hands would run lightly up and leap, landing together, resting silently, watchfully, with that pulsing peculiar to them.

They cared for each other. They would not touch Bianca herself, but each hand groomed the other. It was the only labour to which they would bend themselves.

Three evenings after he came, Ran tried to take one of the hands in his. Bianca was alone in the room, and Ran went to her and sat beside her. She did not move, nor did her hands. They rested on a small table before her, preening themselves. This, then, was when they really began watching him. He felt it, right down to the depths of his enchanted heart. The hands kept stroking each other, and yet they knew he was there, they knew of his desire. They stretched themselves before him, archly, languorously, and his blood pounded hot. Before he could stay himself he reached and tried to grasp them. He was strong, and his move was sudden and clumsy. One of the hands seemed to disappear, so swiftly did it drop into Bianca's lap. But the other—

Ran's thick fingers closed on it and held it captive. It writhed, all but tore itself free. It took no power from the arm on which it lived, for Bianca's arms were flabby and weak. Its strength, like its beauty, was intrinsic, and it was only by shifting his grip to the puffy forearm that Ran succeeded in capturing it. So intent was he on touching it, holding it, that he did not see the other hand leap from the idiot girl's lap, land crouching at the table's edge. It reared back, fingers curling spiderlike, and sprang at him, fastening on his wrist. It clamped down agonizingly, and Ran felt bones give and crackle.

With a cry he released the girl's arm. Her hands fell together and ran over each other, feeling for any small scratch, any tiny damage he might have done them in his passion. And as he sat there clutching his wrist, he saw the hands run to the far side of the little table, hook themselves over the edge and, contracting, draw her out of her place. She had no volition of her own—ah, but her hands had! Creeping over the walls, catching obscure and precarious holds in the wainscoting, they dragged the girl from the room.

And Ran sat there and sobbed, not so much from the pain in his swelling arm, but in shame for what he had done. They might have been won to him in another, gentler way . . .

His head was bowed, yet suddenly he felt the gaze of those hands. He looked up swiftly enough to see one of them whisk round the doorpost. It had come back, then, to see . . . Ran rose

heavily and took himself and his shame away. Yet he was compelled to stop in the doorway, even as had Bianca's hands. He watched covertly and saw them come into the room dragging the unprotesting idiot girl. They brought her to the long bench where Ran had sat with her. They pushed her onto it, flung themselves to the table, and began rolling and flattening themselves most curiously about. Ran suddenly realized that there was something of his there, and he was comforted a little. They were rejoicing, drinking thirstily, revelling in his tears.

Afterwards, for nineteen days, the hands made Ran do penance. He knew them as inviolate and unforgiving; they would not show themselves to him, remaining always hidden in Bianca's dress or under the supper table. For those nineteen days Ran's passion and desire grew. More—his love became true love, for only true love knows reverence . . . and the possession of the hands became his reason for living, his goal in the life which that reason had given him.

Ultimately they forgave him. They kissed him coyly when he was not looking, touched him on the wrist, caught and held him for one sweet moment. It was at table . . . a great power surged through him, and he gazed down at the hands, now returned to Bianca's lap. A strong muscle in his jaw twitched and twitched, swelled and fell. Happiness like a golden light flooded him; passion spurred him, love imprisoned him, reverence was the gold of the golden light. The room wheeled and whirled about him and forces unimaginable flickered through him. Battling with himself yet lax in the glory of it, Ran sat unmoving, beyond the world, enslaved and yet possessor of all. Bianca's hands flushed pink, and if ever hands smiled to each other, then they did.

He rose abruptly, flinging his chair from him, feeling the strength of his back and shoulders. Bianca's mother, by now beyond surprise, looked at him and away. There was that in his eyes which she did not like, for to fathom it would disturb her, and she wanted no trouble. Ran strode from the room and out of doors, to be by himself that he might learn more of this new thing that had possessed him.

It was evening. The crooked-bending skyline drank the buoyancy of the sun, dragged it down, sucking greedily. Ran stood on a knoll, his nostrils flaring, feeling the depth of his lungs. He sucked in the crisp air and it smelt new to him, as though the sunset shades were truly in it. He knotted the muscles of his thighs and stared at his smooth, solid fists. He raised his hands high over his head and, stretching, sent out such a great shout that the sun sank. He watched it, knowing how great and tall he was, how strong he was, knowing the meaning of longing and

belonging And then he lay down on the clean earth and he wept.

When the sky grew cold enough for the moon to follow the sun beyond the hills, and still an hour after that, Ran returned to the house. He struck a light in the room of Bianca's mother, where she slept on a pile of old clothes. Ran sat beside her and let the light wake her. She rolled over to him and moaned, opened her eyes and shrank from him. "Ran . . . what do you want?"

"Bianca. I want to marry Bianca."

Her breath hissed between her gums. "No!" It was not a refusal, but astonishment. Ran touched her arm impatiently. Then she laughed.

"To—marry—Bianca. It's late, boy. Go back to bed, and in the morning you'll have forgotten this thing, this dream."

"I've not been to bed," he said patiently, but growing angry. "Will you give me Bianca, or not?"

She sat up and rested her chin on her withered knees. "You're right to ask me, for I'm her mother. Still and all—Ran, you've been good to us, Bianca and me. You're—you are a good boy but—forgive me, lad, but you're something of a fool. Bianca's a monster. I say it though I am what I am to her. Do what you like, and never a word will I say. I'm—sorry you asked me, for you have given me the memory of speaking so to you. I don't understand you; but do what you like, boy."

It was to have been a glance, but it became a stare as she saw his face. He put his hands carefully behind his back, and she knew he would have killed her else.

"I'll—marry her, then?" he whispered.

She nodded, terrified. "As you like, boy."

He blew out the light and left her.

Ran worked hard and saved his wages, and made one room beautiful for Bianca and himself. He built a soft chair, and a table that was like an altar for Bianca's sacred hands. There was a great bed, and heavy cloth to hide and soften the walls, and a rug.

They were married, though marrying took time. Ran had to go far afield before he could find one who would do what was necessary. The man came far and went again afterwards, so that none knew of it, and Ran and his wife were left alone. The mother spoke for Bianca, and Bianca's hand trembled frighteningly at the touch of the ring, writhed and struggled and then lay passive, blushing and beautiful. But it was done. Bianca's mother did not protest, for she didn't dare. Ran was happy, and Bianca—well, nobody cared about Bianca.

After they were married Bianca followed Ran and his two brides into the beautiful room. He washed Bianca and used rich lotions.

He washed and combed her hair, and brushed it many times until it shone, to make her more fit to be with the hands he had married. He never touched the hands, though he gave them soaps and creams and tools with which they could groom themselves. They were pleased. Once one of them ran up his coat and touched his cheek and made him exultant.

He left then and returned to the shop with his heart full of music. He worked harder than ever, so that Harding was pleased and let him go home early. He wandered the hours away by the bank of a brook, watching the sun on the face of the chuckling water. A bird came to circle him, flew unafraid through the aura of gladness about him. The delicate tip of a wing brushed his wrist with the touch of the first secret kiss from the hands of Bianca.

The singing that filled him was part of the nature of laughing, the running of water, the sound of the wind in the reeds by the edge of the stream. He yearned for the hands, and he knew he could go now and clasp them and own them; instead he stretched out on the bank and lay smiling, all lost in the sweetness and poignance of waiting, denying desire. He laughed for pure joy in a world without hatred, held in the stainless palms of Bianca's hands.

As it grew dark he went home. All during that nuptial meal Bianca's hands twisted about one of his while he ate with the other, and Bianca's mother fed the girl. The fingers twined about each other and about his own, so that three hands seemed to be wrought of one flesh, to become a thing of lovely weight at his arm's end. When it was quite dark they went to the beautiful room and lay where he and the hands could watch, through the window, the clean, bright stars swim up out of the forest. The house and the room were dark and silent. Ran was so happy that he hardly dared to breathe.

A hand fluttered up over his hair, down his cheek, and crawled into the hollow of his throat. Its pulsing matched the beat of his heart. He opened his own hands wide and clenched his fingers, as though to catch and hold this moment.

Soon the other hand crept up and joined the first. For perhaps an hour they lay there passive with their coolness against Ran's warm neck. He felt them with his throat, each smooth convolution, each firm small expanse. He concentrated, with his mind and his heart on his throat, on each part of the hands that touched him, feeling with all his being first one touch and then another, though the contact was there unmoving. And he knew it would be now, soon.

As if at a command, he turned on his back and dug his head

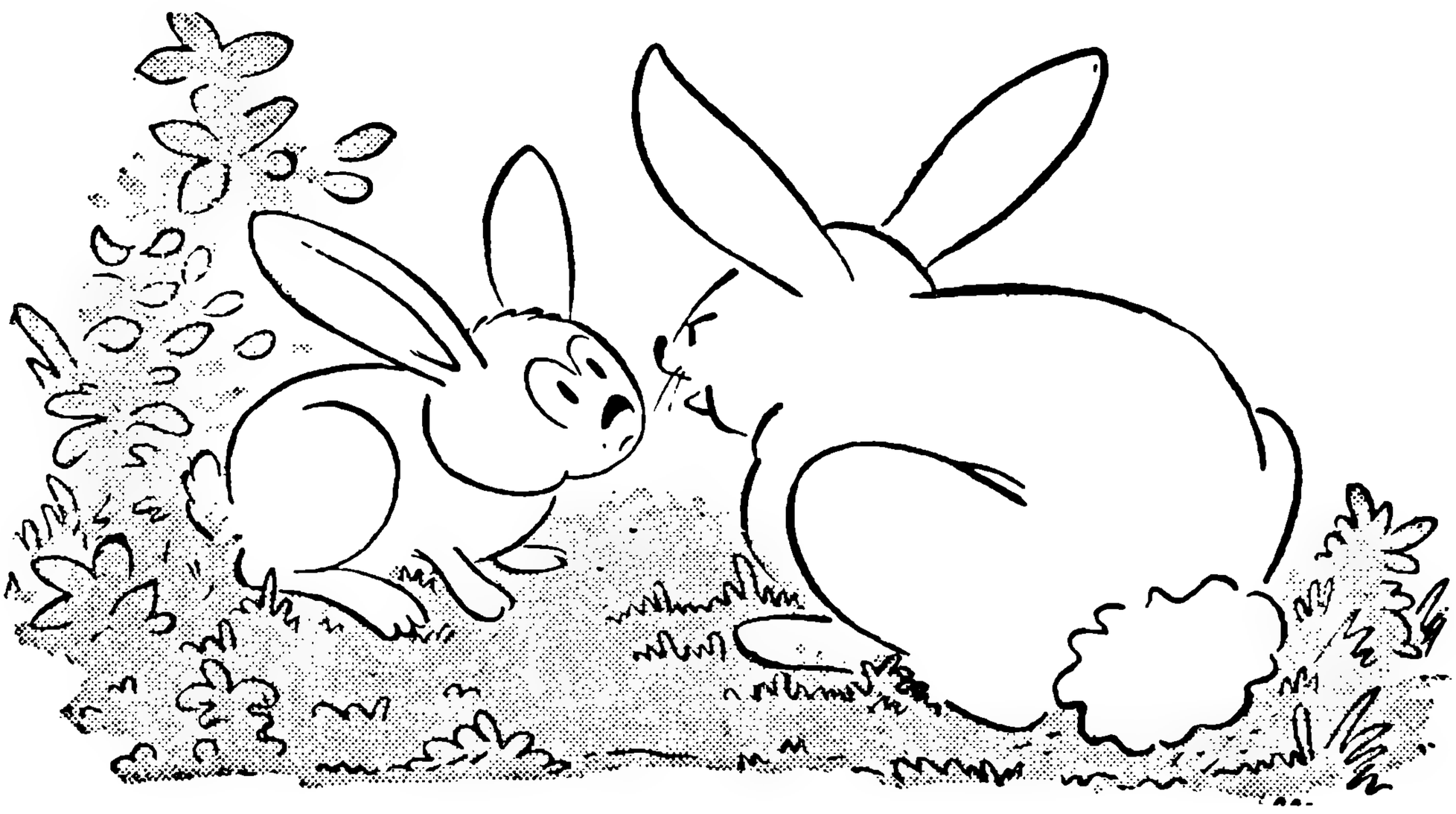
into the pillow. Staring up at the vague dark hangings on the wall, he began to realize what it was for which he had been working and dreaming so long. He put his head back yet farther and smiled, waiting. This would be possession, completion. He breathed deeply, twice, and the hands began to move.

The thumbs crossed over his throat and the fingertips settled one by one under his ears. For a long moment they lay there, gathering strength. Together, then, in perfect harmony, each co-operating with the other, they became rigid, rock-hard. Their touch was still light upon him, still light . . . No, now they were passing their rigidity to him, turning it to a contraction. They settled to it slowly, their pressure measured and equal. Ran lay silent. He could not breathe now, and did not want to. His great arms were crossed on his chest, his knotted fists under his armpits, his mind knowing a great peace. Soon, now . . .

Wave after wave of engulfing, glorious pain spread and receded. He saw colour impossible, without light. He arched his back, up, up . . . The hands bore down with all their hidden strength, and Ran's body bent like a bow, resting on feet and shoulders. Up, up . . .

Something burst within him—his lungs, his heart—no matter. It was complete.

There was blood on the hands of Bianca's mother when they found her in the morning in the beautiful room, trying to soothe Ran's neck. They took Bianca away, and they buried Ran, but they hanged Bianca's mother because she tried to make them believe Bianca had done it, Bianca whose hands were quite dead, dropping like brown leaves from her wrists.



A magician pulled you out of a hat—
now run along and stop bothering me.

TREATMENT FOR SHOCK

You don't get far in the City clad only in a blanket

BY JOHN SALT

THE outward and visible sign that was Albert Jenner—a timid, untidy little man in his early thirties, with a round face of no distinction, and a wisp of sandy moustache upon his upper lip which lent him a faint air of perpetual bewilderment—walked towards the river by way of Lower Thames Street, with no established intention of Ending It All.

It was true, of course, that within him there burnt the twin fires of anger and resentment, and that he was in a mood of black depression. But Albert had been brought up in the belief that emotions were there to be controlled, and he was doing his best to observe the rule in spite of a growing conviction that life, taken by and large, was a bit of a stinker.

Albert had worked rather too long for an old-fashioned firm of merchant shippers in Fenchurch Street and had that morning seen a long-expected promotion pass him by. It was a little too much, even for Albert, and he had hurried from the office before a tactless remark from a colleague should betray him into open and undignified rebellion. Now he paced the streets, fighting a lonely and quite inconclusive battle with his inner self, an intransigent entity which had been causing trouble of late.

A pale ray of sunshine struggled through the overcast October sky and Albert felt slightly more cheerful. He walked along a narrow lane between tall warehouses as far as a short flight of steps leading to the river wall where he frequently took a stroll.

The tide was past the flood, and a freighter riding high in ballast passed downstream with her screw turning idly half out of the water. Her wash sent long waves to lap against the river wall, and set small boats dancing upon the grey water. Among them was a dinghy with two boys on board, one of whom balanced himself precariously in the stern. Even as Albert gazed, the boy lost his footing and tumbled into the river.

The wind was chill, but Albert hesitated no longer than it took

to throw off raincoat, shoes, and hat before hurling himself to the rescue. He should have waited longer, for it speedily became evident that the boy could swim far better than Albert. A few vigorous strokes took him to the side of the dinghy, and he scrambled inboard just as Albert, going down for the second time, was borne swiftly past on the ebb-tide.

His next conscious impression was of a hand being hooked in his jacket collar. He was hauled bodily from the water and deposited seconds later upon the deck of an ocean-going tug. His rescuer, the giant, black-bearded Norwegian skipper, threw Albert into the oily warmth of the wheelhouse where he collapsed in a sodden stupor while shouts, the clanging of bells, and a thudding vibration announced that the tug was turning round.

He sat up, shivering, as the engines stopped in a frenzy of telegraph bells and the tug bumped gently against a landing-stage. The skipper burst into the wheelhouse like a gale of wind and, seizing Albert's right hand, began furiously to pump it up and down. Such violent action caused Thames to pour in a flood from Albert's nose and mouth and he spluttered in watery grief, while thinking how comfortingly warm the captain must feel in reefer jacket, ribbed woollen jersey, and thigh boots.

The Norwegian ceased his pumping to peer earnestly into Albert's drowned eyes. Then he felt his sodden garments with vigorous patting movements which knocked the hard-won breath from his victim.

"You are all vet, by Gar!" he announced in triumph, and began to dance agitatedly around the wheelhouse, muttering to himself, "Shock. Vot to do for shock?"

A sudden happy thought appeared to strike him, and he threw open the lid of a locker to reach deep inside for a bottle. There was no finesse about the skipper's first aid. He grasped Albert by the shirt-front as if to do him injury, and poured the greater part of the contents of the bottle down his throat. This accomplished, he snatched a blanket from another locker, threw it around Albert, and tucked him under one arm.

Thus laden, he appeared on deck to receive an ovation from his crew, who now joined in to help their captain ashore with his burden. Albert, already half drowned, was now half drunk on the fiery schnapps from the captain's bottle, so he found nothing odd in being carried along the quay in a blanket by a bearded blue giant who reeked of tar, diesel oil, and crude alcohol.

The rescue party followed the river for perhaps a hundred yards before turning sharp left down some steps into another narrow alley between warehouses. Albert could not identify his surroundings, and his mind was still hazy, when the Norwegian

shouldered his way into a public house and lowered his burden reverently on to a low settle by the fire. Albert struggled dizzily to a sitting position but was at once knocked flat by a rush of howling savages who tore from him every shred of clothing and left him by the fire, clad only in the ship's blanket from whose hairy folds he peered out cautiously like a very shy satyr.

His garments vanished one by one over the counter where they were received by a broad-busted barmaid who swiftly bore them away to a secret room at the back. Albert, in whose stomach salt water and turpentine tried vainly to emulsify, attempted to protest, but the sound of his own voice proved so discouraging that he gave up almost at once. So he sat in state, wrapped in his blanket, while the tugboat's crew squatted around him in a semicircle, drinking from large tankards and passing polite remarks upon Albert's physique which at close quarters was interesting, although hardly impressive.

The valiant captain now approached the group by the fire, bearing with him a quart measure, a poker, and a varied assortment of bottles. He stood over Albert, swaying gently on wide-planted feet, and smiled with a wealth of benevolence.

"Joost a liddle Narvik I make for a hero," he assured Albert cheerfully. "Joost a liddle Narvik Sinker, dot's the t'ing for shock. By Gar! She melt the Nord Pole. She make dead men to valk, the liddle Narvik Sinker."

He giggled delightedly and knelt before the fire to thrust the poker into its glowing heart. While the metal heated he set down his pewter measure by Albert's side and poured into it a pint of black stout, which he laced with rum and with brandy. Then the captain reached into his hip pocket and produced his own fearsome bottle. He poured a generous quantity from it into the tankard, and placed the repellent draught in front of Albert.

"You want me to drink that?" asked Albert unhappily.

The Norwegian raised both hands in horror. "Not yet," he cried. "She not ready yet. Very bad for you if you drink now."

Albert thought he was probably right.

The captain now turned his attention to the poker which glowed red-hot and showered sparks as he withdrew it from the fire. He raised it high and waved it once over his head in ritual gesture, then plunged it hissing into the tankard. The spirits took fire at once and blue flames wandered over the surface of the beer. He extinguished them with a second bottle of stout and thrust the tankard into Albert's hand with a stern command.

"Drink deep, and there shall be no more shock. I, Leif Larsen, guarantee it." Albert took both hands to the measure and lifted it hesitantly to his lips.

He was never afterwards able to describe the experience in detail, but his sensations at the time were sufficiently vivid. The stout was merely a lubricant, its taste was nutty and normal, leaving the stomach without defence against the monstrous shock of the alcohol that it contained. The impact of each drop of spirit released from suspension was like the bursting of star shell. And before the initial explosion could subside, it was joined by a fresh drop which in turn exploded, causing a chain reaction of rum with brandy with schnapps throughout the entire nervous and organic system of Albert Jenner.

The fusion of this alcoholic depth-charge was completed by the subtle action of the red-hot poker which blended each component of the draught, increased its potential, and ensured its maximum durability. It was a drink, said the Norwegian, which stayed by you.

Any tendency upon Albert's part merely to sip was thwarted by the enthusiastic urging of the crew and also by the drink itself, which, by some hydraulic alchemy, encouraged him to swallow the full quart in a very short space of time.

Having drunk, he remained silent for some moments, shaking his head slowly from side to side as if to make sure that it remained upon his shoulders. The movement caused a fold of the blanket to slip from one shoulder and this gave him a grand, if somewhat decadent air, as of one who has declined and may yet fall.

He looked down at himself and giggled. " Beware the Ides of March," said Albert Jenner. And from that moment he never looked back

With song and dance the Norwegian crew were now in the mood to wassail and Albert would certainly have joined them but for the action of the captain who restrained him with gentle touch and a finger laid to the side of his nose.

" Never mix a Narvik Sinker," he said earnestly. " You are now three big bottles ahead of the rest of the world and that is enough to last a man a lifetime. Any more and you get sick. Vy spoil it? "

Albert thanked him politely and settled back in his blanket, pleasantly conscious that the drink was now lighting brisk fires in various parts of his interior. He was conscious also that someone had died and that someone else was rejoicing at the fact in no very seemly manner. At that moment he would have placed his superiority over the rest of the world at three barrels rather than the three bottles mentioned by Larsen. Albert, born below par, had floated a bonus issue.

But at the height of the revelry a clock struck two and Albert

said at once that he must leave, although he had no very clear idea as to where he might be going. The captain tried to dissuade him, but Albert insisted and had reached the door before one of the crew pointed out his unsuitable attire and hauled him back.

"Phooey to clothes," cried Captain Larsen with a wealth of contempt. "Ven men are naked they are as equals. Who can tell a prince from a beggar?" He added as an afterthought, "And vice versa."

The philosophy was sound, but even Albert had to admit that he was unlikely to get very far in the City while clad only in a blanket.

At that moment the barmaid hurried over with his suit which had been very roughly dried over a boiler. The crew eased and tugged him into his clothes and stood off to admire the effect. It was certainly striking, for the legs of Albert's trousers had climbed to his knees and the arms of the jacket to his elbows, while his waistcoat appeared as a thin strip of material straining dangerously across the upper part of his chest.

"They have shrunk, by Gar!" bellowed the captain, and seemed disposed to weep.

"Judge not that ye be not judged," returned Albert with stern composure and, pausing only to put on a pair of green carpet slippers handed to him by the barmaid, stepped through the doorway and out into the street.

He strode through a maze of lanes and alleys until he came to the Mansion House, walking the while with precise care upon a carpet of pneumatic pink cloud which lent a certain spring to his step. Albert accepted this phenomenon without comment as no more than his due who had drunk a Narvik Sinker. He met few people on his way, but when he reached the busy intersection, his appearance should have stopped the traffic. However, the City being the City, nobody took the slightest notice of him.

Presently he turned aside into a tailor's shop. An assistant glanced up from the book he was reading to stare straight at a waistcoat which appeared to be worn as a collar. He goggled a moment before asking his customer's pleasure.

"Fetch me the proprietor," Albert commanded, and beat a brisk little jig upon the counter with his ring finger while the assistant moved reluctantly towards the door of an inner office. The proprietor was a lean, tax-ridden man, with a poor digestion. He had lunched rather badly, and he regarded with some disfavour the scarecrow who had torn him from the sad contemplation of his disordered liver.

"If this is some kind of a joke—" he began, and was halted at once by the frozen dignity of his bizarre customer. Albert

stated his requirements with the minimum verbiage and pointed out that his figure constituted a challenge to any tailor worthy the name.

In no time at all the owner found himself running about his shop with pattern books and tape measure, linings and chalk. At first he was inclined to suspicion and resentment but soon enough those feelings gave way to real pleasure. It was long since he had served a gentleman to the manner born and Albert was obviously the grand seigneur.

Albert ordered three new suits and dressed himself completely from garments already in stock. He exchanged his green carpet slippers for a neat pair of Oxfords and walked from the shop an hour later wearing a black Homburg hat and a greatcoat with a nap as smooth and deep as fur. Before leaving, he warned the proprietor against the ill effects of worry upon the digestion, and advised him always to take a glass or two of Burgundy with his meals. "With a red-hot poker," he added from the door.

He hailed a taxi outside and arrived in considerable style at the Fenchurch Street office where his colleagues were taking their afternoon tea and discussing him very freely. Miss Tovill, the personnel manager, blue-haired and acidulous, gave it as her opinion that young men like the absent Albert were full of strange sins and not to be trusted. The chief clerk, Mr. Screed, half coughed, half tittered in his nervous way and cracked each knucklebone horribly, one by one, while letting it be understood that he knew more than he was at liberty to disclose. The junior, who had been promoted that morning, said nothing at all but became very efficient with the blank sheets of paper that lay on his desk.

It was left to Miss Manno, the newest and least considered typist, to shed a silent tear for Albert. It fell upon the invoice in her typewriter carriage and she smudged it away with her handkerchief.

The conference was interrupted when, at the same moment, the Managing Director sent for Mr. Screed and Albert entered the office. His hat and overcoat made a tremendous impression and Miss Tovill could do little more than stare at them, while Miss Manno turned very pink, which suited her, and bent once more over her machine.

Albert gave his colleagues a benign smile and commenced to pace up and down the shabby office, sweeping a disdainful hand over the dusty mantelpiece, kicking at the worn linoleum, and pausing to feel a tepid radiator.

Screed hurried like a dusty rabbit from the Managing Director's

office and hissed at Albert, "Where on earth have you been, Jenner? Don't you know it is after half past three?"

Albert glanced at his watch which had stopped at the moment of his total immersion. "Is it, indeed? I had no idea. Still, one should never hurry one's tailor, I always say."

The chief clerk gave his celebrated half cough, half titter. "Since when—" he began, then caught Albert's eye and became of a sudden ill at ease. He continued almost apologetically, "You had better go in to Mr. Sparks. He has been calling for you all afternoon."

"Just the man I want to see," said Albert cheerfully and sailed his Homburg to the nearest hat-rack. He walked towards the Managing Director's room, but paused with his hand on the door knob to address the chief clerk.

"I say, Screed, you really must do something about this office. I've been looking around and the place is like a pigsty. And while you're about it, have Miss Manno's desk moved away from the door. Draught's enough to cut her head off. Always remember, Screed, people can't do their best work when they're uncomfortable. Good working conditions make for greater efficiency; important point that, make sure you bear it in mind."

With which parting barrage, Albert kicked aside an errant pink cloud and entered the presence of Mr. Sparks.

Mr. Sparks was at that moment being very angry indeed over a matter concerning the non-shipment of some machinery from Bristol Docks to a customer in West Africa. He looked up impatiently, but for a moment he could only emulate Miss Tovill's admiration of Albert's magnificent overcoat, now unbuttoned to reveal a dark grey suit of immaculate cut. But Mr. Sparks was an executive of the old school and he quickly recovered himself to begin barking complaints at his supposedly improvident employee.

"You're very late, Jenner. What do you mean by it? Don't pay you to idle three hours over lunch. Time is money here. If you don't know that yet, you're no use to me."

Without pausing to hear Albert's reply, he thumped some papers on his desk and hurried on: "And now there's all this. What the hell do you know about the trouble at Bristol? Gross incompetence, I call it. Here the agents tell me the stuff has been warehoused for three weeks and no move at all made to get it loaded on a ship. They say it's all the fault of the London office and I want to know the reason why. You're the shipping clerk, Jenner. What's your explanation, man? Come along, now. Speak up."

Albert spoke up. He flashed into action with a complete

defence of the London staff, followed up with a flat denial of the facts as stated, and concluded with his personal assurance that the machinery should be loaded and upon the high seas within the space of three days.

Sparks blinked and said, rather meekly for him, " Damn it, talk sense, Jenner. We can't get the stuff inventoried in three days, let alone have it loaded. It would be different if there were a man on the spot to gee things up at the docks."

" My own thoughts precisely," said Albert. " I must get down there right away." He glanced at his useless watch. " Let me see now, the trains are too slow and there's no direct flight. There's only one thing for it. I shall have to take the car."

Mr. Sparks was incredulous. " Now Jenner, don't tell me you also have a car."

" Not at all, sir," replied Albert as he buttoned his coat. " I was thinking about the car outside the office."

Mr. Sparks began to foam gently at the corners of his lips. " But, damn it all," he burst out, " that's my car! You can't take that! "

Albert's voice was stern. " Mr. Sparks, do you agree with me that this West African order is of vital importance to the company? "

" Yes, of course it is, but what—"

" And that if we cannot deliver on time we are likely to lose the order and perhaps all future business in the market? "

" Yes, yes, I know all that, but I fail to see what it has to do with you taking my car."

" I should have thought the connection was sufficiently obvious," said Albert severely. Then he added in a kinder tone, " Look here, sir, if you will only accustom yourself to the idea that I am the only man in the world who can save the company, you will not find my demands so unreasonable."

Mr. Sparks rose from his chair in towering rage but before he could pursue his particular line of thought, Albert was speaking again.

" I'll collect some money for day-to-day expenses from Screed. There are one or two bills already but we'll settle those when I get back. While I think about it, I had better have a typist with me. Miss Manno will do very well, I fancy. She's new but conscientious—gets too many colds, though. Make sure Screed does something about those draughts in the office before I get back, will you, sir? "

The Managing Director was beginning to see life through a faint red mist and he seized a heavy ebony ruler with some half-formed notion of battering his way to a better understanding

with his staff. But Albert was already in the lift with a bewildered but happy Miss Manno by his side and one of her small cold hands tucked with his into a pocket of his beautiful overcoat.

Miss Tovill and Mr. Screed watched them drive away in the Managing Director's new and dramatic Rallentando 2-litre Special, while the junior clerk attended to Mr. Sparks, who lay in a species of coma from which he emerged at intervals to murmur weakly, " I like to remember that he called me Sir."

For their part, too, the Bristol agents of Sparks & Co. were long to remember Mr. Jenner and his devoted secretary. The dynamic Albert proved himself a demon of energy and efficiency who drove all with whom he came in contact to the uttermost effort. Yet it was all done with a sweet reason, a discreet courtesy, quite impossible to withstand. He kept his word to Mr. Sparks and stood upon the quay in the evening of the third day to wave farewell to the ship and her cargo.

When all was done he took Miss Manno to a dockside public house and stood drink for drink with the stevedores who had loaded the machinery for him. The glasses went round and round again until Miss Manno did not know a bill of lading from an invoice in triplicate, and what is more, she did not care. They left Bristol next day and when they reached London Miss Manno was wearing an engagement ring and had already made a shorthand rough of her note of resignation.

But Albert had not yet finished with Sparks & Co., nor as it happened with Narvik Sinkers. He had been thinking hard during the long drive home from Bristol and had at length evolved a scheme which was breathtaking in its scope and vision. Back in Fenchurch Street, his colleagues received him with pale respect, and watched him enter the Managing Director's office in the confident and early expectation of an explosion.

Mr. Sparks sat alone at his desk, hitting his head gently with a ruler. His manner was calm and composed, but there was a hunted expression in his eyes as he rose upon Albert's entry and extended a hand to his employee.

" Well done, Jenner," he said heavily. " I have heard all about it and I cannot imagine how you did it. You, of all people."

But Albert waved the congratulations to one side and cast a scrap of paper down upon the desk. Mr. Sparks picked it up and blinked at it in a puzzled manner. " *When life's a stinker, try a Sinker*," he read aloud. " What is all this, Jenner? I don't think I understand."

" It is a slogan that will cover the world," said Albert with pride. " Just think of it, sir. Something new and something

profitable, marketed in enormous bulk by Sparks & Co., the sole agents. I make you the present of a fortune."

Mr. Sparks shook his head wearily. "It's no use. I don't begin to understand. Sit down and tell it to me from the beginning—and, Jenner, tell it slowly. I am an old man and I have been a little unwell. Sudden shocks, you know, any sudden shock—" his voice trailed away into silence.

"I have the cure for your ills," said Albert and he sat down to tell his employer the story of his own regeneration by Narvik Sinker and of the great scheme to which his adventure had given birth.

Sparks heard him to the end and shook his head. "It won't do, Albert, it simply won't do. As I see it, you were lucky to escape with your life. We can hardly condemn the population of the British Isles to cirrhosis of the liver, even supposing that we could obtain the permission of the licensing authorities for such an undertaking."

"You don't follow me, sir. The thing is to dilute the stuff and sell it medicinally. We shall need the original recipe and the help of a good chemist, but I don't think there's any doubt at all that the thing can be done safely. See it my way, sir, just for a moment. Consider the countless thousands of us born hopelessly below par and doomed thereby to a life of fruitless obscurity. Think of the hen-pecked husbands, the men bedevilled by mothers-in-law and maiden aunts. Think too of all the tired, jaded businessmen. I seem to feel a new slogan coming on. How should it go now? *Don't chase your secretary, try a—*"

Sparks shook his head again. "Better leave that one out, Albert, it wouldn't sell a five-pound note. But just the same, I do begin to see what you mean." He began to muse aloud and it was obvious that native caution was rapidly giving way to sound business instinct. "Dilute Narvik Sinker, you say; most interesting. Why, man, the thing has endless possibilities. I begin to see it in powder form, in capsules for rapid absorption. What about presentation flasks with your slogan printed on the label in a decorated cursive script? Dignity, you know, that must always be the keynote."

He paused for a moment, overcome by the grandeur of the prospect, then glanced sharply at the visionary. "This means a partnership, you know."

Albert nodded judicially. "Two, I think, sir, for we also have Larsen to consider."

"Larsen? Ah yes, the Norwegian." Sparks was struck with a sudden sense of urgency. "Look here, Albert, hadn't you better get hold of him right away? He seems altogether too open

and free with his gifts, and it would be frightful if a rival were to get in before us at this stage. Can you find him quickly?"

Albert nodded. "I think so. He will be somewhere along the river. The tug office will find him easily enough."

"Well, then, set about it right away. I'll wait here for you and get a few schemes roughed out."

Albert walked to the door and was about to open it when Mr. Sparks called him back. There was a new and diffident note in the Managing Director's voice as he began to speak.

"Oh Jenner—Albert—damn it all, this is most awkward. Look here, Albert, I remember that you went down to the river once before, just three days ago and when you returned you were, well, quite different from the man I had always known. I make no bones about it, you were greatly improved. I hope there is no chance of a reversal and when you return you will not be as—as—"

He paused confusedly, at a loss for words, and Albert completed the sentence for him, "As I was in the old days, you mean? No fear of that, sir. You must remember that my Narvik Sinker was undiluted, and that way Larsen tells me it lasts a lifetime."

He closed the door and descended in the lift to street level. Outside the day was misty and chill but as Albert walked briskly along and turned presently into Lower Thames Street the sun came out, and quite suddenly all the clouds were pink.

Probably looking for his fingers.

I did but see her passing by
And yet I love her till I die

THOMAS FORD, *c.* 1580–1648

When she came suddenly in
It seemed the door could never close again,
Nor even did she close it—she, she—
The room lay open to a visiting sea
That no door could restrain.
Yet when at last she smiled, tilting her head
To take her leave of me,
Where she had smiled, instead
There was a dark door closing endlessly,
The waves receded.

ROBERT GRAVES, *The Door*

Sprigged Muslin

And so they slid contentedly up the Estuary, till they saw the red and brown walls and towers and water-gates of the town, steep roofs and pointed gables piled up one behind the other as though still shouldering off a fourteenth-century invasion from the Poles.

At one of the houses on the quay . . . he saw a maiden in spread skirts like a convolvulus flower, watering flowers that also looked like convolvulus, though they might have been rockets or azaleas or sea-thrift for all that Leon knew.

For the little garden scrambled up at such an angle from the quay that he had to lean right back to see her through a thin striped tangle of masts and ropes; and she, serious about her watering, did not see him at all . . .

She went on watering, bending and rising again; dark hair parted and lying in a smooth backward slant down her brow and cheek and neck before it was reproved and coiled; sprigged muslin jacket and skirt in a wide bell to hide her slenderness.

. . . Leon was enchanted. "That one, and no other!" he declared. He married her, and they had three children: Elsa and Konrad and Anatol.

G. B. STERN, *Mosaic*

Rich Jewel

O! she doth teach the torches to burn bright
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear . . .
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.
Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Romeo and Juliet*

Conversation Piece

When I came in, Pierre Curie was standing in the window recess near a door leading to the balcony. He seemed very young to me, although he was then aged thirty-five. I was struck by the expression of his clear gaze and by a slight appearance of carelessness in his lofty stature. His rather slow, reflective words, his simplicity, and his smile, at once grave and young, inspired confidence. A conversation began between us and became friendly; its object was some questions of science upon which I was happy to ask his opinion.

EVE CURIE, *Madame Curie*

Love's Arrow

Thence flew love's arrow with the golden head,
And thus Leander was enamoured.
Stone-still he stood, and evermore he gazed,
Till with the fire that from his countenance blazed
Relenting Hero's gentle heart was strook . . .

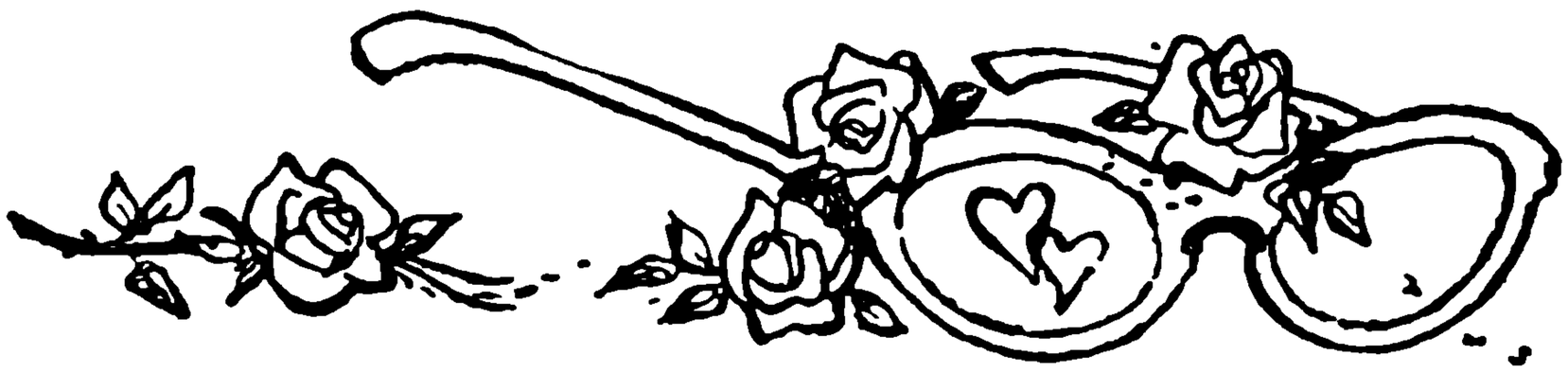
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, *Hero and Leander*

Wakening Blossoms

Morning-fair, follow me further back
Into that minnowy world of weeds and ditches,
When the herons floated high over the white houses,
And the little crabs slipped into silvery craters.
When the sun for me glinted the sides of a sand grain.
And my intent stretched over the buds at their first trembling.

That air and shine: and the flicker's loud summer call:
The bearded boards in the stream and the all of apples;
The glad hen on the hill; and the trellis humming.
Death was not. I lived in a simple drowse:
Hands and hair moved through a dream of wakening blossoms.
Rain sweetened the cave, and dove still called;
The flowers leaned on themselves, the followers in hollows;
And love, love sang toward.

THEODORE ROETHKE, *The Shape of the Fire*



Sparkling Eyes

Vronsky followed the conductor to his mother's carriage. As he was about to enter a lady came out, so he stood aside to let her pàss. A single glance at the lady made him feel by the instinct of a man of the world that she belonged to the best society. He begged her pardon and was about to enter when he was seized by an unconquerable desire to look at her again, not because of her beauty, her grace, her elegance, but because of a certain caressing, tender expression in her lovely face.

She also turned her head as he looked at her. With her bright, grey eyes, that seemed dark under her thick, long lashes, she gave him a searching, friendly look, as though recognising him, then turned, casting about for some one in the crowd. In that short glance, Vronsky was struck by the peculiarly restrained, vivacious expression of her face, her sparkling eyes, and the scarcely perceptible smile that played about her rosy lips. She seemed overflowing with radiance, which against her will shone out in her glance, her smile. The light in her eyes that she tried to hide gleamed out in the splendour of that smile.

LEO TOLSTOY, *Anna Karenina*

LAST RAINBOW

The river's voice swelled to a roar
and my heart rose

BY ARTHUR MAYSE

AT the Ilahee Valley turning I came to a road block with Archie O'Mara beside it, drunk as a lord and weeping fit to break his sinful heart. The old riverman wobbled in front of my car, hand raised to halt me.

" No one's to pass," he said, while the tears glittered through the stubble on his cheeks. " It's the company order, boyo. We shoot the Barrier at twelve o'clock noon by the Lieutenant-Governor's watch, and British Columbia's sweetest bit of a river then becomes a lake."

O'Mara plucked a flask from his hip pocket, tilted it briefly, and then flung it empty into the brush.

" A lake," he repeated. " There'll no longer be a Canyon Pool or a Maple Tree Bend or O'Mara's Chute that was named for my Kathy the time she followed the steelhead through, and her not up to my belt buckle. A great, muddy, filthy lake, and all so that ranchers may wallow in hydroelectricity."

Through his tears—he always wept when in liquor—O'Mara said in tragedy's own voice, " It's holding a wake I am, a wake for the Ilahee."

He rocked on his heels in the dust of a road soon to be deep under water, peering and scowling, and if he had not recognized me before, he did so now. " Heaven help us, it's the Widow Blaney's son, him I taught to fish the Wind Fly when his freckles were thick as a trout's. I'd invite you to my wake, Doctor of Philosophy James Blaney, except I'm out of drinkables and hate the guts of you for the way you served my girl."

" Come off it, O'Mara," I told him. My eyes were sore from a day and a night on the highway, my head buzzed with weariness.

The Ilahee was my river, too. I was born within sound of her, down at Shandon. My grandad was one of the Antrim men who spent themselves trying to farm her valley, my dad drowned when an Ilahee freshet swept him and his logging-trestle away together. I had driven north to kiss her face one last time with

a dry fly before the power commission slaughtered her. O'Mara was a friend of my youth, but neither he nor his road block could stop me.

"I'll help with your wake," I said. I passed him the bottle I had bought at the government liquor store in Shandon, squatting now beneath the new Ilahee dam.

"Wine of the country," O'Mara muttered. "They've not made a Yankee of you entirely, Dr. Blaney." He uncapped the brown Canadian rye and elevated it with a hand grown remarkably sure. "Look now, James, if I may so call you still, I'll not betray my employer, even though it's the devil's work he's after. But were you to slip by while I was on company business elsewhere, your drowning would not be on my conscience."

He cuddled the bottle under his arm and lurched off down the road in his ragged shirt and broken boots, the finest fishing-guide that ever danced a river-boat through white water.

I dropped the bars and drove through. A thing O'Mara had said stuck in my gizzard, though, and I braked my antique coupé beyond the road block. "O'Mara," I shouted after him, "what's this I did to your shrew of a daughter?"

"Find out for yourself, Jim." The rough grey head atop the giant frame did not turn. "Kathy's at Sidehill Pool, if she's not up to her chest in the chute or off into the canyon. The she-fool's gone up by her lone on foot for a last rainbow."

The valley was greener than I remembered it, the mark of the old logging-camp less plain, the flanking ridges softer where fire scars had healed. Otherwise it was as I had dreamt of it—drugged with sunshine, flooded and drowned in scented tides of June. The track curved to an alder swamp. I heard the river's voice then, a murmur that swelled to the full-throated roar of the rapids above Sidehill, and my heart rose to choke me.

The pool coiled, shining, between a gravel bar and a steep rise of second growth. It was empty, head and tail, and I told myself that was the way I wished it, although I had somehow thought to find Kathy O'Mara laying a long line there.

It was ten past eight. I had time to fish five pools before the Lieutenant-Governor pressed a button and killed my river.

I rigged with a Hair-wing Royal Coachman that had served me well on the Yellowstone, and waded out from the bar. As my eyes adjusted to the dazzle of sunlight on rushing water I could see trout in plenty, ranged and ranked across the tail of the pool like soldiers on parade. They would have none of the Royal, however, or of the Orange Hackle, and when I changed to a Spent-wing Adams only a sprat rose to challenge its float.

They were always whimsical, those Ilahee rainbows. When the mood was on them, not even O'Mara's daughter could be more contrary. It was the Wind Fly they wanted, and that fly I did not have.

Can I find Kathy, I thought as I reeled in, she'll have Wind Flies by the dozen. She'll sell me a couple for auld lang syne, and charge no more than a day of an instructor's stipend.

Where the branch creek bubbled into Maple Tree Bend, I found Kathy's spoor. The sand bore the print of a calked boot, stubby and trim as a little hoof, and I knew she had left her waders at home. She would be in jeans, soaked, and glad to be so.

I hunkered in the warm sand, looking down at that small footprint, and a memory came from fifteen years ago to devil me.

I had borrowed grandfather's spliced greenheart, the fine and ancient rod he'd brought from the old country, and was standing up to my middle in Maple Tree, casting my heart, when O'Mara's river-boat knifed around the bend. Spray half hid it as it took the rapids. It glided across the eddy towards me, eighteen feet of mahogany and brightwork, delicate-slim as a racing-shell.

O'Mara had nobody with him that day, only Kathy, kneeling on the thwart, three rainbows before her, and water drops spangling her black hair.

They watched me while I cast again, working to shoot my fly into the main current. Three times I cast, and the rod would have done it, but at ten years old the sixty-foot throw was beyond my powers.

I saw a smile go between them.

" In with you, boyo," O'Mara ordered me, and I scrambled over the side, too stunned by my luck for pride or happiness. O'Mara was the river's master. He was the only man ever to run Ilahee Canyon past Chinaman's Chance rapids, and " No fish, no fee " was his boast to the pilgrims he guided.

" What have you up? " this great man asked me. When I showed him the Parm Belle that dangled from my casting-line, he threw his head, blue-black as his own young daughter's, and roared like the bulls of Bashan.

" Would you kill a bear with a peashooter? " he asked me. Then to Kathy, " Give us a Wind Fly from the box, my sha. We'll arm him with O'Mara's Fancy! "

He tied the powder-puff of white and brown deer hair to my leader, flipping the Turle knot into place faster almost than the eye could follow. I worked out line, the heavy greenheart creaking, and dropped the Wind Fly high and across. It curtsied down the riffle as if it would take wing at the first breeze. The

mad current bounced it aside. It floated sedately upon a glassy slick, and a rainbow long as my arm rolled up to smash it.

Had I caught that trout, I might have forgotten him. He broke me on his first wild run, though, and a lost fish one remembers for ever. I recalled, too, O'Mara's hand on my knee and his kind "Hell's luck, lad!" Best of all—and this is strange, since she was never truly my girl at any time in our growing-up—I remembered the scorn that blistered me from Kathy's blue eyes and the shine of the spray on her hair.

Nine-thirty, my wristwatch said. The morning was slipping away. In two hours and a half the charges would explode, breaching the Barrier, spilling Ilahee Lake down a thousand feet of mountain into the valley trough.

At Larson's Pool I found two cigarette-butts with lipstick on them. She had lingered here awhile, smoking up her courage, before she put safety behind her and ventured on into the canyon.

She shouldn't have done it, I thought, leaning my fly rod against a rock and lighting a cigarette myself. It's too great a risk. Here in the valley one could outdistance the rising water easily enough. But the flood would be into the canyon like the devil through Athlone, scouring the ledges, leaping up the walls faster than any man or girl could climb.

Until now, I had wasted scarcely a thought on danger. Resting quietly here, though, sun hot on my shoulders, river dancing past, I sensed danger as if it were a strong perfume in the air. The valley was too silent, too warm and green and lovely. It was a place with its doom upon it, and I suddenly wished I were clear of it, a long way clear.

I stamped my cigarette into the shingle and turned from Larson's without wetting a line. A hundred yards beyond where I had left my car, a jeep squatted on threadbare tyres. She had parked it as we used to when fire threatened, nose pointed out for quick escape.

To fish Canyon Pool had been no part of my plan, even though the kings of the river lurked in its tar-black eddies. But I still lacked a keeper for my bag, and Kathy was up there, I knew for certain, and where that dark and wilful girl went, I'd follow.

Not to keep her from danger, I assured myself, backing till my car was also pointed down-valley. And least of all for silly sentiment. I wanted nothing but a quick try at Canyon Pool, and a Wind Fly from Kathy O'Mara.

It was calf love only, the feeling we had for each other the spring she was seventeen, and meant no more to Kathy than to me. The truth of the matter was that, except for an hour or two

sweeter than firewood honey, our times together were one long battle. I saw what she could not or would not see—that the Ilahee country must change in spite of us—and at the finish she turned her hurt and anger not upon the nature of things, but on me.

"You'd make us into another America!" she told me hotly. "If you like their ways so much, go south to them, damn you!"

"I'll do that," I answered her. And when the fellowship came my way, I did.

Things might have gone differently another time. But that was the year Kathy's mother died and O'Mara took to the bottle. As for me, I could think only of getting ahead, whatever that may mean, and was too full of my own affairs to help her through her trouble.

Water over the dam, I thought, feeling the canyon chill press in on me as I passed between the limestone bluffs. Anyway, the temper she has, we'd never have got along.

Thinking of Kathy, I stepped down carelessly to a water-slicked ledge. My feet flew out from under me, and only a hasty snatch and roll kept me from the boiling river. It was my old hip-boots that threw me, for their soles were long ago worn smooth. When I had satisfied myself that neither rod nor bones were broken, I stripped the boots off and continued from ledge to ledge in my socks. Presently the tormented stream began to howl like a banshee, and I knew Canyon Pool lay close ahead.

The old excitement gripped me, tightening my chest so that breathing came hard. The thrill of fear was there, too, lending extra caution to my feet. The Ilahee was no friendly river here, but a dark, cruel race that could kill a man, did she ever grip him.

I edged round a rock shoulder and brought the black cauldron of Canyon Pool in sight. All was the same. The creamy foam islands twirled upon the eddy under the far wall. The white flume of the river's entry, the liquorice fern that clung in the crevices of the cliffs were just as I last saw them, four years past.

But nobody stood on our fishing shelf at the head of the pool. Kathy was not here. I grounded my rod-butt and stood staring, angry with the girl at first, then stabbed by a dreadful worry. She's drowned, I thought. Slipped and gone down with none to save her. It was cold here in the gut of the canyon, but the sweat broke out on my forehead.

Behind me, somebody chuckled. A voice said, "Back from the land of opportunity, Professor?"

She looked not a day older, unless it were for a sadness that made her arrogant mouth more lovely. She still wore her black hair cut short, and the river's constant spray lay in diamonds

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upon it. I looked down at Kathy O'Mara, not finding a word to greet her, while she studied me with a devil of mirth in her eyes.

"Your car's not what I expected, Jim," she said. "The same fishing-hat, too, and I seem to remember the boots you left back yonder."

I could not fathom her smile at all.

"Is the gold all gone from California?"

"I do well enough," I said to her stiffly. "I'll be a full professor next autumn. It's just that I like old things." She must have been there in the brush by Larson's all the time. "Why couldn't you show yourself, instead of sneaking in after me? Hell, I'd never have come—"

I would be saying too much in a minute. "You gave me a proper scare," I finished lamely.

"I'm sorry," she said, not meaning it. "I did try to catch you up, but you tore away from Larson's in standing leaps. What was your hurry?"

"I wanted to find you," I said. Then, in case she might arrive at a wrong conclusion: "I can't stir a fin with the flies I've got. I knew you'd have the Wind Fly."

"Well, I haven't," Kathy said in a flat voice, her smile gone. "Try a Black Ant, why don't you? Or a California Coachman."

The look she gave me as she stepped past was twin to the one I had from her when I lost the big trout from O'Mara's boat. She walked the narrow ledge to its end, swung down to the underwater shelf. I heard the vicious screech of her reel as she ripped off line.

Not every poem has words. O'Mara's daughter was poetry itself, knee-deep in that place of terror and enchantment, shooting her fly across to the eddy where the foam islands circled as if they would do so for ever.

I sat on my heels and watched her, wondering why some outdoor girls are horse-faced and brawny while this one was slim and curved and beautiful, as if the river itself had shaped her. Studying her, seeing how the canyon damp moulded blue jeans and shirt to her body, I found it easy for the moment to forget her prickly tongue and hell-fire ways.

Too easy. I made a horn of my hands and shouted to her, "Time's short! Quit wasting it! Give them the Wind Fly!"

I got a hard glance and a fling of her head for reply. But she cast just twice more, then wound in, and waded back with the current slashing round her legs.

"All yours," she said. "The trout know what's coming. They're in a mood, and I don't blame them." She was frowning. She said, "How long, Jim?"

I looked at my watch. " We can stay an hour," I told her. " No longer. It's twenty past ten."

We left the pool to settle, sitting together in a cove overhung by ferns.

" You've been doing well? " I asked for something to say, and Kathy nodded.

" I was," she said. " But I'll not be after they flood the valley. I took over the guiding when Dad gave it up."

" What happened to him? " I asked.

And she said, " You know what happened. You saw the start of it. Last year he took a spill, a bad one, running Chinaman's Chance." Kathy reached for her fishing-bag. Her glance challenged me. " He was drunk, as he is most times. But he got the man with him out alive."

" O'Mara would," I said, and my conscience squirmed for the bottle I had pass d him down at the road block. " What does he do now, Kathy? "

" Casual labour—watchman and the like. I keep him off the river." She had the bag unbuckled. I watched while she stripped silk thread from a spool and nipped a fly-hook between thumb and forefinger. " Not that I'll be having that worry much longer," she said, " since by sundown there'll be no Ilahee."

She laid grey deer hair along the shank, tweaked the fine thread, and the bucktail flared in a bristling ruff.

" It had to come," I said. " I warned you years ago it was coming."

" You did," Kathy said, laying more deer hair along the hook. " ' The world can't stand still for a handful of potato Irish who like to live wild.' Those were your words, in this very place." She tugged, and another collar prickled behind the first. " You were a sound prophet, Jim. No doubt you're proud of it."

She looked at me, the half-finished fly in her fine, long fingers. " I want this world, my world, to stand still. I want things as they used to be—O'Mara on a white horse at the front of the Orangemen's Parade, and running the rapids as he once did."

Her face was a hurt child's, and I saw what I had never thought to see—tears in that proud girl's eyes. " Progress," she said, " I hate it! He's down at his boat every night. The brasswork is polished half away. He's breaking his heart for the river, Jim."

" Kathy," I said to her, from the churning inside me, " you want to have the moon on a platter. It's not progress you hate, but the passing of time and the things it does." The voice was mine, but I had not willed it to speak so. " You've let too much time pass, my darling. I came north because of you, if it's the truth you're after."

She stared at me, her hands still, and her blue eyes widening. I leaned to her and kissed her hard on her mouth, and for an instant, time was turned back indeed. She drew away from me then, and her smile mocked me—the smile I had never yet learnt to read.

" Here is your Wind Fly, Professor," she said, and dropped it in my hand. " Better use it while you can."

I looked back once, wading out towards the rim of the shelf. She sat as I had left her, black head bowed, arms round her knees. The remembered magic had me then, the fight against distance and canyon draught to lay the great bristling, ugly fly upon the eddy. I worked out line and more line, and dropped the Wind Fly across the stream to ride among the lazy foam islands of the whirlpool.

No luck. Not so much as a boil to encourage me, at that cast or a dozen later. Here's something else that has changed, I thought dourly. There was a time when the canyon rainbows would rise clear off the bottom to strike O'Mara's Fancy. They've tasted progress, too, the beasts. They'll touch only imported game-cock hackle tied in New York.

Intent on my fishing, I had not seen Kathy get up and wade out to me. She stood by my off elbow, braced against the tearing current.

Her quiet voice reached me through the din of the river. " Farther over," she said. " One's lying close in to the rock. Steelhead, by the size of him."

My eyes were out of practice. I could distinguish nothing amid the tangle of surface flaws. Still, I worked out another five feet of line on faith.

No trick of current made that swirl. I turned my wrist over, but he had struck short and the fly came away.

" Missed the iron," Kathy said. " Give him a minute to forget it, Jim."

We smoked a cigarette, Kathy steadying herself with a hand through my belt.

" He's back in position," she said at last. I could see the long grey-green shadow now, and the sight turned my mouth dry. Steelhead, right enough. A rainbow trout that had gone to sea and returned with the weight of a salmon, and twice a salmon's power.

The Wind Fly landed upstream of him. It floated above him where he loafed on his ledge, and he let it pass without stirring an inch.

" Cast to his tail," Kathy said from beside me. " To his tail, you fool! "

A breath of breeze idled down the canyon to help me. It caught the Wind Fly at the limit of the cast, danced it, and let it settle daintily as if alive. The steelhead whirled with a flash of rose-tinged silver, and struck. No short rise this time! I felt his heft as the hook engaged, felt pain shoot up my wrist from the impact of the reel handle against a knuckle, and knew I had him fair.

He did not rush downstream as most steelhead do, but straight up through the solid, plunging flume as if it were still water. While he hung on the lip of the rapids, jigging and bucking, I felt a sudden hard push of wind against my cheek. Underfoot, the river-bed quivered.

No sound came with the blast. There was just the pressure of displaced air and the shiver that rippled through the rock. I stared at my watch. Twenty past ten, it still said. My fall on the way in had made a liar of it. But up on the Barrier, the Lieutenant-Governor's watch had not stopped.

" Break him off, Jim." Kathy's voice was steady, but her face had gone very white.

He was the lord of the Ilahee rainbows, the heaviest trout I had ever raised to a dry fly. I pointed the rod-tip at him and hauled, and felt the slender casting-line part, and a heart-string with it.

The canyon mouth was almost half a mile away. For two hundred yards the walls rose sheer, not to be climbed even with desperation driving. We set out together, hearing behind us a humming so low it was no more than an undernote to the river thunder.

" We shan't make it," Kathy said.

" We shall," I said, and dropped my rod and shrugged the bag off my shoulder to have both hands free. A long way above, the sky was a narrow ribbon, impossibly blue. Below us lay Chinaman's Chance, where the stream jack-knifed to pile in a crazy smother against the far wall. Up-canyon, the humming swelled louder.

The first rift in the cliffs was down past Chinaman's Chance. She was right, we couldn't make it.

Pressed to the dark rock, feeling out the ledges with our feet, we rounded another shoulder. Ahead of me, Kathy checked.

" Hurry! " I yelled at her.

She looked back, and she was smiling. " Listen," she said.

" I hear it," I told her. " Now, will you take your foot in your hand, for heaven's sake! "

" It's him," Kathy said. " O'Mara. He's coming for us, Jim."

Then I heard it, too, closing on us from below Chinaman's

Chance, the high-pitched snarl of a motor running wide open. The knife-sharp stem of a river-boat climbed the standing wave at the foot of the rapid.

O'Mara's heavy outboard, with O'Mara's hand on the tiller, drove the mahogany splinter between reefs that flew white guidons of danger from their spikes, up a stairway where the boat was not to be seen for spray and the big man himself rode half obscured.

In the hinge of the bend, even that powerful motor could force the boat only by slow inches.

They struggled there for seconds that seemed minutes, man and boat and river. Then the jaws of the rapids eased their grip, and O'Mara veered his craft in smoothly towards our ledge, as if he were landing at his home float.

The sun, peering into the canyon from directly overhead, struck sparks from the brightwork and arched a rainbow across the bows. O'Mara, sitting erect and easy in the stern sheets, smeared water from his face.

" You were warned against coming here," he said to his daughter. " I'd take my belt to you, if there was time." The strong mirth was in his eyes, and I knew, as I swung Kathy off the ledge, that he was not drunk on rye whisky alone.

" In with you, boyo! " he said to me as he had once long ago. I dropped to the bottom boards. O'Mara put the tiller hard over, spinning his boat in her own lean length. The motor yowled, the boat took the rapids like a scared cat, not stern first under oars, but bow-on and at full throttle.

Behind us, the humming deepened enormously. It became a sustained organ note that drowned all other sound. Over my shoulder I saw the end of the world rushing at us, water in a solid black wall beneath a crest on which the drift of the upper valley danced.

O'Mara's boot was on my shoulder, shoving me down. I was a boy again on my first run with him, trusting him utterly. For O'Mara was the river's master. No other man living had rammed a boat through Chinaman's Chance and fetched it out again.

We could serve him as ballast only. I flashed a look at Kathy where she crouched on the thwarts beside me. She had wished for time to turn back, and the girl had got her wish. At the head of the Shandon Orangemen's parade, her father was never grander.

The gap between the canyon walls widened. A minute—less —and we'd be out to the lower valley. O'Mara swerved to skirt a whirl, grazed the opposite cliff, and skidded us round the last bend above the entrance bluffs.

I saw the grin freeze to a snarl on his wide, hard mouth. Dead ahead, white water spouted where our course should have lain clear. The blast and the earth shudder that followed it had tumbled a rock slide across the river.

There was one gap, narrower, it seemed to me, even than the boat. I heard O'Mara bellow, "Look to her, Jim!" and had time only to lock my hand round Kathy's wrist before he put his boat at the gap like a hunter to a jump.

The sides buckled inward, their air-tight sponsons breaching. The bottom went clear from her, stem to stern. She pitchpolled out of the gap, and the motor dragged her down.

But the bluffs were level with us. O'Mara had brought us clear. Chest-deep in the current, still gripping Kathy, I floundered towards the shore.

She fought against me while I dragged her across the shallows and up past the line of the highest freshet that ever boiled out of the canyon mouth.

From the top of the first hill at the side, we looked back. Larson's Pool was gone; in its place was a drift-littered overflow that expanded before our eyes. The fir snags on the flat already stood in water.

The valley was drowning, the Ilahee dying. A file of deer mounted the opposite slope, moving west to the ridges. Except for those deer and a hawk overhead and us on our hilltop, the valley seemed barren of life.

"He's gone," I said. "It's the way he would have it, my darling."

"Stop quacking!" Kathy flared at me. "O'Mara wasn't born to drown, and you know it!"

We found him at the cars, wringing the wet from his shirt.

"The water cure's been given me," he said, the laughter blazing in his eyes. "I went down with the damned motor on my chest. When I rolled from under it, the crest was past and a log floating by, handy to float me to Maple Tree Bend."

The grand look was on him still.

"The trout will grow larger," he said, "when they're over their surprise. With a lake to swim in and the feed they'll get, we'll be catching thirty-pounders."

He reached for his belt. "I've a duty to discharge," he said. "Take yourself off, Jim, where her screeches will not distress you."

"I'll attend to that," I said, feeling Kathy's hand in mine, and she between tears and laughter at my side. "Now and henceforward."

" Better late than never," O'Mara said. " She's been a charge on me long enough. But a hell of a life she'll lead you! "

O'Mara was right.

We'd have little peace, we'd fight oftener and harder than the cats of Kilkenny. Still, there are worse things for potato Irish than fighting.

★ ★ ★

POTTLE DEEP

Potent brew or simply a nice cup of tea—whatever your fancy we invite you to try your hand at affixing the right labels to the right bottles. The answers, sixteen in all, are on page 143

1. *" Buy bottle of brandy," pleasantly instructs your shopping-list. You know nothing about brandy, although you have heard that three stars are an asset. But we should like to know more about these stars—one, two, or three, what could be, if any, the difference?*

2. *What is, or was, Brandywine?*

3. *" Two leaves and a bud " of an evergreen camellia: too exotic an ingredient, you might think, for any but the rarest liqueur. But it has a nobler role, mainstay of morale, solace in crisis . . .?*

4. *" A wee doch-an-doris? " the unwary Sassenach host asked his arriving guest. His Scottish friend was sair dauntit, and you, no doubt, can tell us why?*

5. *Four orders have been left unclaimed on the bar counter, and little cause for surprise! Can you name four suitable customers for:*
   a. a bottle labelled DRINK ME *and* not *marked poison*
   b. a cup of hemlock
   c. an egg beaten up in sherry
   d. lavender water tinged with pink

6. *Grog is the sailor's sheet anchor, or so they say. Yo ho ho and a bottle of . . . but can it be that grog is simply rum?*

7. *Can you name:*
   a. the usual basis of punch
   b. the ingredients of a Martini
   c. the ingredients of a Side-car
   d. the chief basis of a " cup "

8. *What is corkage?*

CRACKEN JOKE

" Flesh !" he cried. " Flesh !"
and swept her into his arms

BY CLIVE BURNLEY

THE fifteenth Lord Barricoe is a changed man; he says so himself. Perhaps you know him, or perhaps you've paid your half a crown for a conducted tour of Cracken Castle, that grim pile, ancestral home of the Barricoes, jagged with battlements, which frowns over the village of Crosby St. Claverdyce.

From the very worst of motives I propose to tell you the truth about Lord Barricoe, who has refused to make it worth my while to do otherwise. It was ginger-headed Joe Bolton who began the whole thing at a business conference in the Gilt Drawing-Room at Cracken. At that time the Barricoes were fighting for their existence and were in rather greater peril than they had been at Agincourt. It had always been possible to kill the French but Economic Pressure had no throat to cut.

At this critical moment in the history of the family their only hope lay in the tourist trade and Joe Bolton, for Horace Reginald de Launcey Pitchforsyte Bond, fifteenth Baron Barricoe, was nobody's hope, not even his own. He had lost himself in some intellectual high-altitude mists in adolescence and at thirty-five was sick to death of almost everything; a tall and languid man, droopy-jowled, who always gave an impression of really being somewhere else.

Despite this he was actually there, in the Gilt Drawing-Room, as also was Mrs. Lillian Pitchforsyte Medley, a close relative, Miss Lola Fraxted, a secretary, and Bolton. Mrs. Medley was a coyly plump brunette while Miss Fraxted, a shining blonde, was plump in only one—or, more correctly, two places; ginger Joe Bolton was a stocky little terrier of a man, business manager to Cracken Castle and something of a token of Economic Pressure himself. Boltons had been loafing around Cracken Castle in various menial capacities ever since the Wars of the Roses, but now Joe, on the strength of a school-leaving certificate, a ten weeks' correspondence course, and his own unbounded assurance, was accepted as the one commercial mind in this rather vague group.

That summer, takings had been low, but Bolton had a remedy. "We've got to be Gothic," he said.

"Bolton says we've got to be Gothic," Mrs. Medley told Lord Barricoe, who had to have things repeated to him, because he was usually lost in some silent and infinitely deep speculation of his own. The unexpected word disturbed his reverie.

"Gothic, Bolton?" No previous Bolton would have been capable of using the word, not merely to denote a spiky sort of architecture, but to indicate a frame of mind.

"We can't change Cracken," Bolton explained. "It was built to fight from and not to live in, and whatever the tenth baron did to it, it'll never be any different. I suppose even when it was built it was about as close to the gracious living of the period as a stokers' mess deck in a destroyer is to the dining-saloon of the *Queen Mary*. People used to a high standard of living in their council houses aren't going to be impressed by the luxury of our state apartments; they're used to better things. And if we can't be grand, we've got to be grim. We've got to be Gothic."

"And exactly how do we do that?" asked Mrs. Medley.

"Our carpets," said Bolton, "are threadbare. So we take them up. Our lighting's dim. So we make it dimmer. We open up the cellars and call 'em dungeons. I know a blacksmith that'll make up a fine set of torturer's instruments for a couple of quid. We buy a few sets of armour and stand 'em about in shady corners. We open up the windy little stone stairs in the turrets and pretend they're the only ones we've got. We can dig a tunnel under the moat and then next year we can charge another bob a nob for a tour through the secret escape route."

"Oh, that's dishonest," said Miss Fraxted.

"It's showmanship," said Bolton, "and whether we like it or not, we're in the business just as much as any Bearded Lady in the country. Old Armitage'll have to change his tune, too."

"But he does it so well," said Mrs. Medley, "at least, when he's sober. When I listen to him I just can't believe he wasn't at Cracken when I was three."

"He could do even better with new patter," said Bolton. "He can soft-pedal what we call the Gainsborough and he can forget about the bed the Virgin Queen slept in. It wouldn't be worth mentioning unless she'd been murdered in it. But he can let himself go about the siege of 1450; I dare say we could think up some pretty grisly angles to it, if we tried.

"After all, if we say a thing's family tradition, who's to deny it? We could play up the sixth baron, the one who tried to make gold—fit up one of the turret rooms for his laboratory (untouched since his death, of course) and one family tradition could be that

be really did make the stuff and that there's about half-a-million in bullion hidden away somewhere waiting to be found. Real horror-comic stuff, that's what we want! And if old Armitage can pitch it strong—and he can—I should think we could print a brochure, with photographs, and sell a couple of hundred copies a day at eighteenpence. And there's always Black Andrew . . . "

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Medley. "Wicked Black Andrew, the ninth baron, who hanged himself in the Long Gallery. You can still see the hook. Bolton's talking about Black Andrew," she said to Lord Barricoe. "He was a very bad man, wasn't he?"

"Abominable," said Lord Barricoe and sank away again into distant contemplation of nobody-knew-what.

"When Black Andrew was alive," Mrs. Medley explained, "Cracken rang with the screams of women being ravished and the groans of their husbands being run through their gizzards. Oh, he was a very bad boy. Although when I saw him—I was only eight then—I thought he looked rather nice."

"But the ninth baron," said Miss Fraxted, "he must have died in—well, somewhere about 1750."

"Yes, I know, dear," explained Mrs. Medley, "but you see, he haunts the Long Gallery."

"My father saw him," added Bolton, "and *his* father—but I never did. Oh yes, we can certainly use him. Might even persuade the B.B.C. to do one of their haunted house vigils. Why, with the right publicity we might run a night-shift and open at double price for ghost-watchers half an hour before midnight."

"Oh, you clever Bolton!" said Mrs. Medley.

"I don't like it," Miss Fraxted said, a little pale. "I may be silly but I don't like meddling with things we know nothing about. The thought of it's made me feel cold all over!"

"My dear girl," said Mrs. Medley with concern, "now you mention it, you don't look at all well."

"I don't feel very—" began Miss Fraxted. And then she screamed.

Lord Barricoe came down, flustered, from the clouds.

"Lola!" cried Bolton, and he and Mrs. Medley rushed to the girl's assistance and started loosening things. They were so busily occupied in doing this that several minutes elapsed before anyone realized that there was a fifth person in the room. If person is the right word.

It was early afternoon, and although the Gilt Drawing-Room, like every other room in Cracken, was a dark and shaded apartment, it was still indisputably broad daylight. There, nevertheless, he was, and a glance was enough to show what he was, not merely because he wore knee-breeches, lace ruffles, satin brocade

waistcoat, periwig, and sword, but because one could clearly see the furniture through his semitransparent midriff.

Miss Fraxted gave a deflationary sigh and sat throbbing; Bolton's hair cannot have stood on end, but at least it seemed to become very untidy all at once; Mrs. Medley went rigid. But the fifteenth Lord Barricoe, who had long ago lost all sense of wonder and could no more be surprised, when fully conscious of his surroundings, than a chest of drawers, accepted the encounter with perfect equanimity.

"Andrew, ninth baron Barricoe?"

"The same, fifteenth baron," replied the apparition, in such a full and yeasty voice that it did not seem possible it could have come from this ounce of luminous vapour. "Wild Black Andrew himself! Lesser men are will-o'-the-wisps, poltergeists, noises in the night; but look at me! Shod and sworded and powdered! Who dare say there is no privilege in the after-life?"

"Not I," said the fifteenth baron. "It's very nice to see you, Andrew. But was there any particular reason for your coming?"

"Only that you need me," answered Black Andrew. "I heard what Bolton said. Boltons were all impudent dogs, a family of thrusting upstarts, but the damnation of it was they were always right. He's right now. And by your leave I'll put such Gothic magic into Cracken as'll make these cosseted peasants who come here understand that there are worlds outside their warm little huts, and things in those worlds besides television sets and electric wash-boilers."

"You've kept up to date, my lord," said Bolton.

"And were you really as black as you were painted?" asked Mrs. Medley.

"Blacker," said the ninth baron. "Far, far blacker! Oh, how the memory of it racks my soul! That I should never be able to do it again! But enough! There is work to be done. Bolton, let us discuss how my peculiar talents, as a disembodied being, can best be utilized in the service of Cracken Castle."

"My lord," said Bolton enthusiastically, "there's no limit to what you might do. You could shake the whole civilized, faithless, material world!" he said, a streak of his nonconformist mysticism revealing itself.

But Andrew didn't. It is quite an astonishing thing, but he didn't. The world was more civilized, material, and faithless than Bolton had bargained for, and this was at least one occasion when that family's reputation for omniscience was not justified.

The plan that Andrew and Bolton, the vapour and the flesh, arrived at that afternoon—the fifteenth baron, even in such circumstances, had soon slipped back into his private trance—

was extremely simple and was put into effect the following day.

Business was now so slack at Cracken that there was usually only one party going round at any one time and the guide was normally old Armitage, who bore ceremoniously upon his shoulders his great alabaster face and spoke in sacerdotal tones perfectly enunciated but not *quite* correct English, and was altogether so superbly the superior retainer of tradition that you might have guessed him to be an actor of talent ruined in his profession by demon drink, which was exactly the case.

Old Armitage was not in the least disconcerted when he was introduced to the ninth baron; he had seen much more terrifying things after a couple of bottles of gin.

It was arranged that in the Long Gallery Armitage should draw attention to the fatal hook still to be seen in the beam. He should tell at length the terrible story of Black Andrew, his wild life and sinful death. When he finally spoke of the apparition so frequently seen in that apartment, Andrew would walk through the wainscots, take a turn about the gallery before the cowering patrons, and eventually go out pouff! like a blown candle.

Bolton would have liked him to address the visitors but apparently there was some point of spectral etiquette which forbade him to speak except to the fifteenth baron and his household; it was perhaps upon this that the scheme foundered.

In any case, it did founder—it didn't work.

The public refused to respond as expected. There were those who said, "Coo! Clever, ennit? Done with mirrors and fluoross-ient paints, I suppose." Some, chronically insensitive, failed to see anything. The conditioned eyes of others could perceive nothing at variance with their experience and took Black Andrew for a footman, powdered and wigged, a shocking waste of manpower. Many protested, but not for the expected reasons. One artillery colonel said it was outrageous. "It's in the worst possible taste to turn a historic building like this into a circus! Tell Lord Barricoe that I protest most emphatically against this vulgar exhibitionism. Here is my card. And tell him I shall write to *The Times*."

Dogs, in surprising accordance with tradition, gave better reactions. So did children. One mother of a tearful daughter demanded her money back. "When I get home I'll have the poor girl psychologized and I'll send you the bill and if she's got a composition or an implex or anything I'll *sue* you!"

There were even astonishing occasions with prim parties whose individual members were so loath to draw attention to themselves by making any sort of comment that they continued to troop by with wooden faces. There were factory outings so jovially busy

with beery badinage that they paid no real attention to anything in Cracken, including Black Andrew, but jostled through.

Bolton even contrived to lure some earnest researchers to the castle, but with no better result. One director of a society for psychic investigation explained their attitude.

" For hundreds of years," he said, " people have been sitting up nights and getting pneumonia doing it just to catch a second's glimpse, or hear a single noise, or smell the smallest whiff, and none of them had certain success. Now you offer me something that turns up every afternoon much more punctually than my train at Liverpool Street station. Well, it just won't and can't happen like that. It's damned clever and I'll never know how you do it, unless you tell me; but you don't want scientific investigation. What you want is a good variety agent and a booking at the Palladium." This idea did in fact rather appeal to Bolton and he discussed it at length with Black Andrew; they had even begun tests to discover how far geographically Andrew could travel from Cracken while retaining his powers. But a series of unexpected events put a stop to their plans.

Shortly after lunch one day, Horace Reginald, fifteenth baron Barricoe, came drooping quietly into the Long Gallery with a coil of new rope over his arm and his usual remote and unbetraying expression on his face. Carefully and unhurriedly he took a couple of chairs, stood one upon the other, and secured the rope to the beam. Then he descended and began to tie a noose in the other end of the rope. This gave him some trouble, not because he was nervous in any way, but because he had never been a Boy Scout. He was still struggling with his running bowline when his ancestor materialized at his elbow and stood looking at him.

" Oh hullo," said Horace Reginald. " By the way, is it painful, this sort of thing? "

" I don't really know, fifteenth baron," answered Black Andrew. " When it happened to me I was insensible from strong liquor. That's why I began haunting—innocent blood crying out for justice and that sort of thing. You've got to have some sort of grievance; all ghosts have persecution mania."

" So it was murder? " said Horace. " I never knew that."

" Oh yes—cold-blooded murder. I was quite annoyed about it at the time. A valet of mine, one of the Boltons. But he was right, you know! After all, this is the home of the Boltons too and he could see that at the rate I was going I'd ruin the place in another couple of years. But in your case," said Andrew, pointing to the rope, " I suppose it's entirely your own idea? "

" Well, not quite," said the fifteenth baron. " If it weren't for you I wouldn't be doing it at all."

"Oh, damnation to you!" replied Black Andrew angrily. "I did my best. I can't help it if people in this century won't believe there's anything not dreamt of in their philosophy now they know about nuclear fission. It isn't my fault that all the—"

"Of course not!" said Horace Reginald. "You misunderstand me. I only meant that you were my inspiration, my dear Andrew. Before I met you I thought this sort of thing simply led to oblivion. But now—well, I suppose the real truth is that I ought to have been a lord when lords were lords and everybody knew it. I just hate *doing* things."

"And I," said Andrew, "I hate not doing things."

"Life's a horribly strenuous affair," said the fifteenth baron. "It makes us all senile in the end. It's altogether too exhausting. But it's entrancing to watch. Perhaps that's what life is: a sort of television programme for higher beings to look in at."

"You're a damned odd fellow," said Andrew.

"And you're a very lucky one," said the fifteenth baron. "*You* don't have to eat and shave and bathe and sleep; you don't have to take pills and pay bills and make money and write letters and *waste* all your time as we do. You can just loaf about and watch and think and struggle towards the great truths without any distraction whatever. Wonderful!"

"What!" cried Andrew indignantly. "Wonderful to taste nothing, to feel nothing, to lust for nothing, not to be permitted one tiny little sin!"

"It's a matter of temperament," conceded Horace, struggling patiently with his noose. "I'd change with you cheerfully."

"Zounds!" said Black Andrew, "would you?"

"Like a shot," said Horace.

"Well, dammit now," mused Black Andrew, "I wonder. Drake did it, that time they beat his drum. Oh yes, it *can* be done. I know it can, both parties being willing. If only I could remember the trick of it!"

"If you could," said the fifteenth baron, "it would save the scandal, as well."

"I must think," said Black Andrew.

About fifteen minutes later old Armitage led his first afternoon party of visitors into the Long Gallery. He noticed the coil of rope and the displaced chairs and at first thought that someone had been after the alleged Gainsborough. Then he saw the fifteenth baron Barricoe, or at least someone wearing the fifteenth baron's face and trousers. He led his party forward, to prepare for the arrival of the fleshless apparition of Black Andrew; but this party was to have a much more exciting experience.

Lord Barricoe rushed upon Armitage. He embraced him like a Frenchman, making inarticulate gurgling and seething noises of delight which horrified and repelled the old man. Next he skipped giggling and guffawing among the visitors, slapping backs, shaking hands, kissing women, ruffling hair, smacking bottoms.

"'Ere!" cried an enraged voice, "what's the game?"

"Lord Barricoe!" protested Armitage.

"Inbreeding, that's what it is," said a solemn youth, picking up the spectacles which had been knocked off his nose. "Makes 'em all loopy in the end."

But Lord Barricoe was away, shouting and laughing like a maniac. Through the Armoury, kicking over the halberds; through the Chinese Room, smashing a Ming vase; down the grand stair, whooping and cheering; at last crashing, flushed and shining, into the Gilt Room, where the business managers of Cracken were holding a solemn inquest on last week's takings.

Bolton stared at him thunderstruck. "Lord Barricoe!"

This astonishing new Horace Reginald was plainly a leopard who had changed every spot on his coat and was now not so much spotted as striped with blazing neon—tiger, tiger, burning bright! It was not merely the radiance of zest and delight that shone in his eyes which gave this impression; there was a subtle change about the flare of the nostrils and the flexing of the eyebrows.

"Horace!" said Mrs. Medley. "How amazing! You look as if you had blood in your veins after all, just like other people!"

Lord Barricoe stood there, breathing heavily and gloating upon them—the stubby ginger Bolton, plump dark Lillian, and the blazing blonde Miss Fraxted who had just come into the room by the other door carrying teacups on a tray.

"Lola!" cried Lord Barricoe, without hesitation or preamble "Lola, will you marry me?"

"Oh, Horace!" said Miss Fraxted. "Horace," she sighed, seeing nothing but the words LADY BARRICOE in ten-foot letters of flame. "Horace!" she cried, and dropped the tray clatter-bang-smash on the carpet.

Lord Barricoe swept her into his arms with abandon.

"Flesh!" he cried. "Flesh!"

Mrs. Medley thought the remark in appalling bad taste having regard to Miss Fraxted's mammalian development.

Lord Barricoe, since that day, has remained a changed man.

☆ ★ ★

ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

BE SHOT FOR SIXPENCE

by MICHAEL GILBERT

I did not intend to commit murder—I must ask you to believe this. And my motive was not only self-preservation. More than my life was at stake.

There could be no hope for my old friend Colin Studd-Thompson or his vital mission, if I was liquidated. I was playing a lone hand, fumbling my way, conscious of hidden danger, with very little idea of the outcome for Colin or for me.

"Attention, Philip . . ." As soon as I had spotted the announcement in the personal column I knew it was a danger signal meant for me—and for me only. Colin was officially a member of the Diplomatic, but in fact employed by Intelligence on top-secret missions inside the troubled perimeter of Europe. Only as a last resort would he have put out this discreet distress signal to me in London.

Evading pursuit, I made my way to the Schloss Oberstein-brückl in the Austrian mountains from which Colin had disappeared three weeks ago. Here I discovered the enigmatic Ferenc Lady and his staff ostensibly engaged in "ethnographical research," but the proximity of the Hungarian border confirmed my suspicions that far more crucial

matters were afoot. No one, not even Lady's assistant Lisa Prinz, my wartime colleague, nor the attractive Truë would give me any help concerning Colin. Thwarted in my attempts to obtain information across the border, I sought out Major Messelen, a German ex-officer with whom Colin had been friendly. He suggested taking me to a meeting at a local cinema where I might obtain further contacts with Co'in.

Finding the meeting surrounded by police, we drove off in Messelen's car. Losing our way, we consulted his map . . .

THE light from my torch cut across Messelen's hand, onto the map.

"Where did you get that lighter?"

"Curious, is it not?" said Messelen. "But pleasant. A girl gave it to me. Hold the light steady."

My hand was shaking. I snapped off the light.

"What is it?"

"It sounded," I said, with a conscious effort, "like footsteps. Might have been imagination." But I knew it was not imagination. I was out on my own now, and everything was real.

Very gently I eased open the door on my side of the car. Then I bent across to Messelen and whispered, scarcely moving my lips, "Watch that patch of darkness ahead." He nodded, and I stepped out onto the grass.

The blood was drumming such a devil's tattoo in my head that I could hear nothing outside.

I moved round, came back again on Messelen's side, slipped my hands through the open window of the car, and got him round the neck.

Messelen was a much bigger and heavier man than me, and stronger in almost every way, but his body was wedged down into the bucket seat, and that took away nine-tenths of his advantage. He couldn't even bring his knees up.

A rock climber is not a gymnast, but his life may hang on his wrists and his fingers. Mine were the strongest part of me, and training had doubled their strength.

Even then, if Messelen had been able to think, he could have saved himself. His best chance would have been to sound the horn. That would have brought his friends running. But it is difficult, even for a brave, clear-headed man, to think, when life is going out of him.

He made the mistake of trying to pull my hands off. He might as well have tried to unlock a bolt without a spanner. Then, but too late, he went for my face and eyes.

I buried my head in the small of his back. He could only catch a piece of my hair, and that he pulled right out. I think I laughed at that.

At the end of two minutes, his body had stopped threshing, and in four, I was sure that he was dead.

I shifted the body across to the other seat, and got in beside it. Then I started the car, turned it, and started back towards the gate. My hands were shaking so badly that I needed both of them on the gear-lever.

At the gate I stopped. I realized the danger, but there was nothing I could do about it. It took an age to get the gate open, and another age to get the car out on the road. Messelen had swung in with one confident movement. It took me four shots, backing and starting again each time, to get out onto the road and pointed back towards Steinbrückl. I must have left a track like the entrance to a tank lager.

As I got going down the road, I thought I heard a car starting, either in the woods or in the grounds beyond. I had no attention to spare for it. Something was wrong with my wrists, and if I got up any speed at all this was translated into a horrid wheel wobble. Luckily the road was straight, downhill, and absolutely deserted.

" Get off the road," said the monitor inside me. " Stop behaving like a fool and get off the road." I was running back into the vineyard area which I had noticed on our way out. There was a gate on the right. I swung round towards it. It was a single gate and it may have had some flimsy sort of lock. I butted the radiator straight into it; the gate gave way, and I was headed down a flint-gravel path.

Ten yards along I stopped, got out, walked back, and lifted the gate back onto its catch. It didn't seem to be much the worse for its experience.

At that moment I heard a big car coming. Heard, not saw, because it was carrying no lights. I went down flat on my face and stayed there until it was past.

Then I got up, walked back to Messelen's car, and drove on. I hoped that the path led somewhere. It wandered down—between rows of vines, which sprawled in a patchwork along the side of the hill. Presently I had gone far enough to be out of sight of the upper road. Below me, a long way below, I could see the silver line of the river. I drew up and saved myself the trouble of switching off by clumsily stalling the engine.

I have no idea how long I sat in the blessed silence and starlight. I could hear a passing and repassing of cars on the upper road, and once I saw the fan beam of what looked like a searchlight. But no one came near me.

I was in baulk.

When my thoughts began to run consecutively I found that I was thinking about my first meeting with Messelen. How I had come into the room and had seen him, standing, with the sun behind him, in a blaze of quiet glory. And how I had liked him. That was the bitter thing. Just how stupid can you be?

It was absolutely plain to me now: the steps by which he had led me on; his well-judged reluctance to help; his titbits of information, each one served up at the exact moment; his " No,

you make the plan. You're the leader. I'll play second fiddle "—in fact, he the conjurer, me the stooge.

What had been his plans for me that night? First, I judged, a very unpleasant reception had been awaiting me in the Blue Cinema. It could have been almost anything. The cards were stacked for them. It was their stamping-ground.

Gheorge, Ferenc Lady's secretary, good patient Gheorge, had put a stop to that. It had been a word from him which had had the cinema surrounded, and had caused my enemies to remake their plans on the spur of the moment. A miracle of improvisation. All the same, if I had not been asleep, besotted by my confidence in Messelen, I must have seen the raw edges and the joints. However hard Wachs and the Markgraf were talking, could they have walked through those silent streets and failed to hear Messelen's car starting and restarting behind them? Thugs like Wachs and the Markgraf—people who only remained alive as long as they remained suspicious?

But I had swallowed it all. When the fish is once on the hook he does not easily fall off.

What had been planned for the final act? A stealthy approach to the house. A quick coshing. A quiet disposal of the body. Good lord, they need not have troubled themselves about that. I could have been left to lie. What was I, a foreigner, unaccredited, in disguise, with a gun in my pocket, doing on private property at that time of night?

Lady might have guessed the truth. He could have done nothing. He would have done nothing.

A little shiver ran through me, and I found myself smiling. If I was starting to feel sorry for myself I was, indeed, cured. For I well knew that I had no reason for complaint. On the contrary, Fate, in that last moment, had dealt me a fifth ace, right off the bottom of the pack.

If Messelen had not taken out his cigarette-lighter I should now have been as dead and as cold as he was.

I leaned over him, felt in his side pocket, and pulled it out. It was a heavy, chased-silver lighter designed in the shape of a book. I knew it well. *I had given it to Colin Studd-Thompson on his twenty-first birthday.*

I climbed stiffly out of the car and looked about me. I knew now roughly what I wanted. It took ten minutes' search before I located the vigneron's hut, away to my left, down a side track. The door was on the latch, and inside were mattocks and spades. I was careful to touch nothing, and I had my handkerchief round my fingers before I would even lift the latch.

I made my way back to the car. I had noticed a pair of chamois-leather driving-gloves in the dashboard locker and I got them out and put them on. If I had been stupid so far, I must try to redeem it by extra care from now on.

There was a rug on the back seat. I folded it across my back. Then I got Messelen out, and up onto my shoulder. He was

heavy, but my mountaineer's technique helped, and I was confident that I could carry him down as far as the hut. When I got there I laid him carefully on the edge of the flint path.

The moon was well up now, and by its light, I looked around for the exact spot I needed. The careful vigneron fights a year-long battle, hoeing and digging and clearing the soil round the roots of his beloved vines. I wanted a place where the soil had been turned recently, but not too recently. I found the exact spot some fifty yards downhill, and set to work.

First, I spread the car rug on the path. Then, using a spade, very, very carefully I took off the top layer of earth and piled it on the rug. Then I got busy with the mattock and hollowed out a shallow grave. It had to be shallow, the ground was too hard for deep digging. I got down about two feet.

I laid Messelen in his grave. Before doing it, I searched his pockets but got nothing more for my pains than an automatic pistol, a doorkey, and a handkerchief. I piled back the undersoil, pressing it as flat as I could; then I added as much of the dry topsoil as would go in without leaving a hump. I slashed lightly across the whole area with the mattock. Not just the grave but a good piece around it as well. There was a bit of topsoil left over. I dragged it off down the hill in the rug and sprinkled it broadcast among the vine roots.

When I came back past the spot where I had been digging I had genuine difficulty in locating it. Only morning would show if I had made a good job, but I fancied that if no one with too critical an eye came by for twenty-four hours, Messelen might sleep there undisturbed till doomsday.

When I had polished the spade and mattock and put them away and got back to the car, the stars were pale and the light of morning was coming back. Also a mist was creeping up from the river.

I still had a lot to do.

First I took off the brake and started the car downhill with a push. I guided it for about twenty yards along the path. Then I went back and examined the place where it had stood. The flinty, chalky soil, which had been such a hindrance to digging, was here a godsend. There were light marks of the tyres in the dust, but nothing permanent; nothing that a single farm-cart or even a stiff breeze would not wipe out. I took a particular look to see if the car had dropped oil or left any other sign of where it had stood, but I could find nothing. There were one or two footsteps where I had got out, but I brushed these over with the folded rug.

I then set to work on the car itself. First I went over the body-work, holding the left-hand glove in my gloved right hand and using it as a polisher. Then I shook every bit of earth off the rug and folded it back onto the seat.

The next thing was to find a way out. Forward, if possible. The car would leave marks if I turned it, and I didn't really fancy my chances on the upper road. I had one or two bad minutes as the path wound and twisted its leisurely way down the slope.

Once I thought it was petering out altogether; then I saw the turning, and shortly after that a gate. It led me out to a farm track. The gate was not locked.

Dawn was coming upon me in great strides. I ran the car slowly along the track until I could see the farm. The track went slap through the middle of the farmyard. It was quite a big place; probably the farm that owned the vineyard. At the very last possible moment, I cut out the engine. The gradient was steep enough to carry me through. A dog barked twice, angrily, and then, with my last remaining momentum, I swung round the corner and was out onto the main road.

I looked at my watch. It was five past four, and here came the mist, both to help and to hinder. I had reached that stage of fatigue when my eyes were playing tricks, and twice I braked as shadowy vehicles loomed down on me, only to fade into nothingness as I stared at them.

I got to the Mariankirche, through the ghostly streets of Steinbrückl, as the bells sounded out the half-hour. I had seen no one; nor, I think, had anyone seen me. I parked the car as nearly as I could remember the way that Messelen had parked it, switched off, and sat for a moment to think.

There were one or two things at the back of my mind. Things that I ought to do before I went home. My mind wasn't turning over very fast, and the bell sounding the three-quarter hour brought me up with a jerk. First, it warned me that if I didn't keep moving I should sleep: and at the same time it started a useful train of thought.

Messelen was a solitary man. It might be some time before he was missed. Therefore, and plainly, the more doubt about his movements the better.

I climbed out of the car, eased the door shut, and stole into the house. Messelen's front door opened to the key I had taken from his pocket. I left the door on the latch, and put the key on the mantelshelf. Then I went round Messelen's bird-cages, carefully lifting off the cloth squares that covered them. The birds were very quiet, and the big yellow cock bird looked at me out of one eye as if he knew what I had done.

I got out the bowl of seed and piled up their dishes to overflowing and filled up their little water troughs. I reckoned they had enough to get by on for a day or two, probably longer.

Then I took out the gun Messelen had lent me. I was pretty sure what I should find, but I examined it to make certain. The clip was all right, and the bullets in it looked genuine. I took it right out, pulled back the firing slide to eject the round in the breach, and then pulled the trigger. Nothing happened at all. I looked at it again. The spring was there but the pin had been removed.

I polished it off carefully in my gloved hands, reloaded it, and put it back in the drawer of the table.

Then, after a final look round, I tiptoed back the way I had

come, and was soon clear of the town, heading into the blessed mist for the Schloss Obersteinbrückl. I have no recollection of reaching the castle, but Lisa Prinz says that she was up early and saw me from her window. She says she knew from my walk that something was badly wrong and that she ran down and opened the side door for me; and that I walked straight past her without a word, with a face like death, and went up to my room.

I bobbed about for a few uneasy hours on the surface of sleep and waking. I dreamt no dreams; I was not deep enough asleep for dreams. I knew that the hours were going by and the shadows lengthening on the wall, and I heard the small sounds as evening came on and the castle woke.

It was a barking of dogs that pulled me finally back to reality. I slipped off the bed, feeling for a moment that sort of spurious light-headedness that comes when I am really tired, and walked across to the window. Three storeys below, the two mastiffs, Tutti and Lippi, came bounding out of the postern gate and caracoled off into the woods with the lovely Truë Kethely behind them. She was taking them for their evening outing.

I ran a basinful of cold water, pushed my face into it, and held it there until I was seeing red spots, and then pulled it out, and gave it a towelling. Then I combed and brushed my hair, hard. It made me feel a little better, but not much.

When I got down, Ferenc Lady, the head of their organization, was waiting in the ante-room. Waiting for me, I guessed. "How did you get along with the Major last night?" he asked.

"All right."

"A rough party?"

God damn the man. What was he hinting at? Quite suddenly I realized that he wasn't hinting. He knew. My first reaction was anger, followed, in a photo finish, by alarm, and then relief.

Lady stood watching me, perched on the fender, grinning all over his face like a pert young crow. "Better come inside," he said, "and tell poppa all about it."

"I suppose it's no good suggesting you mind your own damned business?"

"No good at all."

"Who told you? Gheorge?"

"Of course Gheorge told me. It would be a funny sort of organization here if he had not done so."

"In spite of the fact that I only told *him* under pledge of secrecy."

"You're talking like a Boy Scout," said Lady. "Have a cigarette. Oh no, you don't, do you? Then just relax, and reflect how lucky it was that Gheorge *did* keep me informed."

"It was your people who put a police cordon round the cinema?"

"Our powers are not quite as extensive as you seem to imagine, but a word in the ear of the Austrian police sometimes produces results."

"Just what was due to happen in the cinema?"

"It's a little difficult to predict, but I rather think that you were going to make an indecent assault on a young lady, and her escort was going to hit you, and there was going to be a small but high-class fight. Messelen would have got away with a black eye and possibly a sprained wrist. But you—alas—I fear you would not have survived."

"The Roehm technique," I said. "If you plan to murder a man, be sure you take away his character first."

"Oh, certainly. The Major was a Nazi to the boot-heels. But do not underrate him. He was a high-class operator. His real name, by the way, was Felder. You remember?"

"Faintly," I said.

"He was one of the luckier ones at Nüremberg. Not quite enough evidence for a capital sentence. He was not one of the biggest shots, you understand, but well up in the third rank."

Memory stirred. "He was the Hauptmann Felder who carried out the Pinzio massacre."

"Alleged," said Lady, "alleged. He carried it out so thoroughly that absolutely no one was left to testify against him."

I was thinking of the first time I had met him, in that clean room, full of sunshine, with the cathedral bells chiming and all the birds singing. I remembered, too, the evening he and I had followed Wachs through the dark streets to the office of the British Consular Agent, Major Piper. Wachs was with Mitzi, Major Piper's assistant.

"He fooled me," I said, "to the top of my bent. What was the programme that first evening?"

"Oh, the standard technique. If you had gone inside Major Piper's office, I do not think you would have walked out again. Messelen's story would have been that you had got drunk, which was true."

"Partly true."

"And had tried to interfere between some man and girl, and the man had assaulted you. Possibly thrown you downstairs. A broken neck. What easier?"

"How very fortunate," I said, "that Major Piper should have arrived when he did."

"Oh, very," said Lady. "Very."

"Perhaps you will explain two things I find puzzling?"

"Of course."

"Why, after all that, did you allow me to go out with Messelen last night, in complete ignorance of his real character?"

"That is only one question."

"The second is even more curious. When you spoke just now of Messelen, you said, 'He *was* a high-class operator.' You spoke of him in the past. Almost as if he were dead. I find that curious"

Lady looked at me for a long moment, and I thought, for the first time in our brief acquaintance, that I could detect a hint of uncertainty in his manner. Then he smiled, a big, simple, frank

smile; frank as any expert witness under cross-examination. "Why," he said, "don't tell me I was mistaken after all. Did you not kill him?"

"Yes, I killed him."

"You had me worried for a moment," said Lady, relaxing. "But if that's right, what's the mystery?"

"The mystery," I said patiently, "is how you knew anything about it. You knew I was going out with Messelen, because Gheorge broke his word to me and told you. You knew about the cinema, because that's something you arranged. But nobody on God's earth can know what happened afterwards."

"It would perhaps be exaggerating to say that I *know*."

"Don't fool yourself. You couldn't even guess. It was one chance in a thousand that anything would happen at all—except my death."

"I wouldn't put it quite as high as that. After all, consider the chances. The Major was not a heavy smoker. But he was bound to take out his lighter sooner or later."

I said stupidly, "He didn't use it to light a cigarette. It was to look at a map. *How the hell did you know?*"

"Of course I arranged for him to have it."

"You *what*?"

"Try not to be obtuse. I arranged for him to have the lighter. I had it given to a girl, with instructions to give it to him—not earlier than yesterday morning. The danger was that you might see it too soon."

I could feel my anger getting hold of me. Only it was the wrong sort of anger. The cold and comfortless anger that roots in fear. "Would you mind telling me what the devil you mean?"

"I shall tell you nothing if you make a scene about it."

"You'll get no scene from me," I said stiffly. "Just tell me the story. Where did you find the lighter?"

"It was picked up on Pleasure Island by one of my men, on the night Studd-Thompson disappeared. We knew it was his. Truë had seen it many times—"

"And you had it planted on Messelen so that I should see it, and lose my head, and kill him. Before he could have me killed."

"Your synopsis is accurate, with one exception. I did not for a moment imagine that you would lose your head. Or, if you lost it, I knew that you would recover it very quickly. Perhaps you would be agreeable now to telling me what happened last night?"

"Why should I?"

"Why should you not?"

"Because—" fury came bubbling up in a great cold wave, like the seventh wave of seven, taking away my breath, overwhelming me, blinding me—"because for all I know, as soon as it serves your purposes, you will inform the police about me as easily and as quickly and as treacherously as you have broken every promise you have made since I came here."

"And did I ask you to come?"

That pricked the bubble. I subsided into a chair, feeling limp, and with nothing left to say.

" You must also remember— " having achieved his effect, Lady performed another of his lightning changes and became sweet reason itself—" that you, who are, you will pardon the expression, an amateur, have elected to play a part in a match of professionals. A match which is played by its own rules, of which you know nothing at all."

" And want to know nothing," I mumbled.

" Nevertheless, I will explain the rules to you. I think you have earned it. The first is that you trust no one unless you are forced to. The second is that you tell no one anything unless it pays you to do so. Pays *you*, not him. When an opponent at bridge gives up a trick, you do not say, ' How kind of him,' you ask yourself, ' Why did he do it? What future advantage does he hope to gain? ' The third— "

" Spare me the third."

" The third is even more important. You start from the assumption that anyone might betray you. Anyone. Not only your opponents but your associates as well. In any organization such as this, it pays to base every plan on the absolute assumption that your opponents will have succeeded in introducing one of their side into your team or, more simply, in corrupting one of your team."

" Lisa did tell me that Mitzi, Major Piper's blonde secretary, was a spy."

" Oh yes. Of course, Major Piper knows she is a spy. And by now, she knows that he knows. Her employers would replace her if they could, but Major Piper will not dismiss her because he knows where he is with her."

" Also," I suggested, " because she is his mistress."

Lady considered this. " I can see no logical connection," he said.

" I have always been led to suppose that the female spy seduced the Intelligence Officer so that he would babble his secrets to her when in her arms."

" Your ideas are old-fashioned. Now when I am in bed with a woman I never speak at all. I— "

" All right," I said. " We'll leave it there. I take it, from what you say, that you have a traitor here."

" Of course."

" And you know who it is? "

" Well, I have a very shrewd suspicion. After all, the field is not wide. It might be our host or hostess. Unlikely, perhaps? I agree. It might be their son, the Herr General. Or the dutiful Gheorge. Or the experienced Lisa. Or the so sweet and so disingenuous Truë." His tongue flickered for a moment between his teeth. " Or it might have been Studd-Thompson. Or it might be you."

" If a joke, a poor one."

"Or it might be me."

"I hope you're not serious."

"Of course I'm serious. Put yourself in the shoes of our opponents. If they wish to buy themselves an ally in our organization, what more natural and effective than to choose the head of it?"

"Really," I said weakly, "if you were a traitor, you'd hardly take the risk of suggesting the idea to me."

"I fear that your bridge-playing has led me to overestimate your mental ability. However, to business. I have a proposition to make to you. Much of what I have said has been leading up to it."

"Almost everything you have said has been calculated to make me distrust you."

"Exactly. That is why I put my proposition in the form of a bargain."

"I have nothing to sell."

"That was perhaps true yesterday. Now it is not true. It is absolutely essential to me to know what did happen last night after you left the cinema. You are unlikely to tell me of your own free will and I have no way of making you talk, or no quick and easy way. Therefore I will buy the information."

"For what?"

"In exchange I will tell you exactly what is going on here."

"I have been told various stories already. How am I to know that this will be the truth?"

"Even you should, I think, be able to recognize the truth when you hear it."

"It has a certain rarity value round here," I agreed. "Very well." I was aware that I was placing my neck at his disposal, but there was a certain relief in getting the story told.

Lady made me describe the house, the grounds, and the wood. And then identified them to his own satisfaction on one of the large-scale maps on the wall.

He did not seem interested in the precise location of the body. "A vineyard," he said. "I think that was a fortunate inspiration. The vignerons are very regular in their habits. And they have no reason to dig deep. Tell me again about the car."

I went over that part of it again.

"You parked the car outside his flat? Just as he had left it? And you are certain you left no prints? on the gear-lever? on the brake?"

I thought hard. "No, I polished both of them. And I drove back wearing gloves. That must have rubbed off any marks that were left."

"Yes. A certain amount will depend on how soon someone drives a cart down that track. What about the lighter?"

I took it out of my pocket and handed it over.

"The incinerator, I fear," said Lady. "Am I now to fulfil my part of the bargain?"

"If you please."

"For myself, I should be delighted. It was you that I was

thinking of. What I have to tell you really *is* a secret. It is at present known, in full, to perhaps six people in Hungary, and a dozen in the West."

"I should feel privileged to join the circle."

"Yes," said Lady. "Do you carry poison?"

My feelings must have been apparent because Lady smiled. "It is quite a simple precaution," he said. "No real trouble, and not as dramatic as it sounds. Studd-Thompson, I know, did so. In a very small metal container which could be braced without discomfort to the inside of his teeth. He took it out at night, I understand."

"Just like dentures," I said. "Suppose you tell me the secret and leave me to judge what precautions are necessary for its preservation."

"Very well," Lady sighed. "You will understand me when I say that military espionage is now almost as out of date as the bow and arrow. The last people to recognize this are, of course, the military intelligence departments. But it is nevertheless a fact. The days when Mata Hari lavished her charms upon senior Generals and extracted from them, between the sheets, the tonnage and performance of the latest tank are, alas, gone. Nowadays if we want a military secret we buy it. It is a question only of paying sufficient. Either in money or in kind. And even if this were not so, you will agree that it is futile to expend blood and effort in obtaining information which will be out of date six months after you have obtained it."

"So what do you do?"

Lady said, "It has been called psychological warfare and it has been called propaganda. In communist circles it is sometimes referred to as mass indoctrination. I have a simpler and easier word for it. I call it interference."

"Right," I said. "They interfere with you. You interfere with them. More particularly you interfere with Hungary. You throw Spanners into Works."

"Exactly."

"And what particular spanner are you now engaged in throwing?"

"It is, of course, axiomatic that you attack an opponent where he is weakest. The weak spot of the régime in Hungary, as you may know, is the industrial worker. He has a scarcity value. There is not enough of him to go round. It gives him a bargaining position.

"Did you know that last winter, so short were they of miners, the Budapest police were driven to round up criminals, gipsies—prostitutes even. It was not a success."

"I should have thought the miners would have loved it."

"After a number of unfortunate incidents, the women anyway had to be released. But you can judge from that—which, by the way, is absolutely true, for I have a most reliable informant in the coal-mining centre at Pecs—how vulnerable the government is

likely to prove on its industrial front." I thought about it.

It seemed to tie in with what the Baron had told me about the position in Hungary. "Just what are you planning?"

"A General Strike."

The words floated quietly out. From Lady to me. Into my head and out again. Through the windows, over the trees, across the mountains, across the plains. The words turned into ideas and the ideas into pictures. Half a dozen men in a small back room, smoking and talking. A knot of workmen meeting in the shadowy corner of a huge workshop. A crowd in an open place, in the rain, listening to a man in a raincoat, talking, talking, talking. The rain drumming on the cobblestones. The crowd surging and breaking. The drumming of the rain changed to the metallic chatter of machine-guns. A man screaming.

"How can you keep such a thing secret?"

"You cannot, altogether," agreed Lady. "The Hungarian Government know of the danger of industrial unrest. They must be aware that agitators are increasingly active. They may even suspect that they are being subsidized and encouraged from abroad. But exactly what we plan and when and how—that much I think is still hidden from them."

"Do they know of *your* connection with it?"

"There are signs of uneasiness. The troop movements I mentioned look like an attempt to seal this particular section of the frontier. And yet, I don't know. We shall see."

"When and where does it start?"

"That is a thing that David Szormeny—the strong man of Hungary—would give up to half of his treasury to know. I think you would be happier without the information."

On reflection I agreed.

I can't remember if anything more was said. I had a lot to think about, and I think better if I move, so I walked in the garden in the twilight. The bats were out, swooping and fluttering. I find them no more sinister than mice or cockroaches.

My mind was on strikes. I had never considered them before from the viewpoint of the strike-maker. The fermenting of strikes was traditionally one of the things that the communists did to us. Not we to them . . .

After dinner I played bridge, badly, for an hour, and then gave it up. My mind was not on the cards.

I dragged my feet upstairs to my room. I was confident that I should get no sleep.

When I opened my door I stopped. There was a patch of lightness on my bed where none should have been.

"Don't turn on the light," said Truë.

When I got farther into the room and my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, I saw that she was sitting up in the middle of my bed, wearing my pyjamas.

"Who told you you could wear these?"

"No one."

"Take them off at once."

"But of course."

I was wrong. I slept very soundly that night. And for some nights to come.

I am certain that outwardly my relations with Truë did not appear to change at all. But Lisa knew all about it. Only once, in the course of that week, did she say anything. I was alone on the terrace and she came and sat down beside me.

"You find Truë sympathetic?" she said.

"Very."

"Be warned, then. She has Pisces in her horoscope."

"And that, I suppose, makes her a slippery customer."

"You must not laugh at the planets."

"I don't laugh at them," I said. "I just don't believe in them."

"How can you not believe them, when what they say comes true?"

"If you go on making predictions long enough, a few of them are bound to come true in the end. By the law of averages—"

That started a wrangle, as had been my intention.

My relationship with women has always followed that pattern. I start by loving them, truly and wholeheartedly, until in time they come to love me. Then I get frightened. Or tired? The cynic, Claude Anet, said: *Aimer, c'est difficile. Etre aimé, c'est fatigant.* Only a Frenchman could have said it, but there might be a particle of truth in it.

So far as Truë was concerned I never had time to get beyond the blissful first stage. Possibly she was destined to be the big exception in my life.

When I think back over my time at Schloss Obersteinbrückl I find that I can remember the early days down to the death of Major Messelen in detail, day by day. After that my impressions begin to blur. If I take pencil and paper and a calendar I can sort it out, but I can't remember it.

It must have been about halfway through that week that Major Piper drove up behind me as I walked through the square and invited me to jump into his car.

"What's this?" I said, as I got in beside him. "Arrest?"

"A year ago I might have said yes to that," said the Major. "Now I'm just a consular agent. No executive powers. A sort of diplomat." He gave a little snorting laugh at the thought of himself as a diplomat.

We drove down to the river. The Raab, which is joined by the Feistritz ten miles lower down, has here been artificially broadened out to a shallow lake. The stream is unnavigable above the town by anything bigger than a canoe, but below the town small motor launches run down to the junction on the Hungarian border. Little sailing-boats, their white sails gleaming in the sun, swooped across the water on both sides of Pleasure Island. At this time of the

morning the bandstand was empty and the side-shows were shuttered, but the strip of beach was alive with sun-brown children.

" Pretty, isn't it? " he said.

" Smashing. What did you bring me here to talk about? "

Two very bright, but very worried eyes looked out at me from under the sandy tufts of the Major's eyebrows. When I had first met him I had thought him a fool. I realized that I had been wrong.

" The Austrian police have been getting at me," he said. " They seem to think that you've killed somebody."

" Did they say who it was? "

" Yes. A man who called himself Messelen. Real name Felder."

" Had they any reason for their suspicions? "

" You had been going about with him a good deal lately. And were seen with him in his car the night he disappeared."

" Isn't it rather shaky reasoning? He had plenty of other friends."

" Policemen don't work by reasoning. They go by information received. Someone has given them a straight tip. They say you knocked Felder off and buried him. They've been doing a bit of digging."

" Where? "

" Oh, all over the place. In the woods and fields."

" They've got quite a lot of ground to cover."

The Major looked at me and said, " You're a cold-blooded fish, if you'll excuse my non-diplomatic language. By the way, did you know you were being followed? "

" No. Who by? "

" The police. They tagged onto you as you came into the town. Out at the castle you're in baulk. Lady's outfit has got a sort of diplomatic immunity. But they'll pick you up as soon as you step out. There he is. Twenty yards back, on the other side of the road."

There was a grey car there, all right, with a middle-aged driver cutting his nails. He didn't look like a policeman.

" Not a bad thing, really," added the Major. " From your point of view, I mean."

" If you say so."

" The lesser of two evils. If the police weren't there, I expect Messelen's friends would try to get at you. Dirty crowd."

We sat for a moment, watching the children on the beach. Two small boys were trying to drown a smaller one. Like children all the world over.

" I'll do what I can for you, of course," said the Major, at last. " You'll excuse me asking, but is this sort of thing quite your cup of tea? "

" Intelligence work? " I said. " From what I've seen of it, it makes muck-raking respectable and sewage-disposal clean."

" It's not all it's cracked up to be. Like war but without any of

the chivalry or trappings. Necessary in its way, I suppose. It did occur to me to wonder—not that it's my business—but is there any reason why you shouldn't cut adrift and go home?"

"Not really. I came out to find a friend of mine. But I'm beginning to believe he's dead I'd go tomorrow, only Lady seems to want me to stay."

"I see," said the Major. He started the car and turned it towards the town. "It's your life."

The driver of the grey car put away his nail scissors and came round behind us in a leisurely curve.

It wasn't that afternoon but, I think, the following one that I happened to interrupt Lady at work. I had gone in to talk to Gheorge and I found the three of them there. Lady in his shirt-sleeves, heels up on the table, cigarette-holder in mouth, listening, and Gheorge and Lisa with pencils and notebooks out.

As I came in they waved me to silence. There was a crackle of atmospherics, and the wireless receiving-set in the corner said, in Hungarian, "David Szormeny speaks."

Lady nodded. Gheorge reached out and pressed a button, and I heard a soft whirr of the monitoring tape-recorder. Then a voice.

My Hungarian is exact, if not colloquial. I listened, held, in spite of myself, by the unseen speaker. I have always thought that there is an art of oratory that is quite independent of the spoken word. The art of the hesitant beginning, and the calculated pause; the variations of tempo, not so slow as to numb, not so fast as to bemuse; the introduction of each new theme; the careful crescendo; the stupendous finale. It seems trite to compare a great speech with a work of music. It *is* a work of music. A solo for the finest and most variable instrument ever created, the human voice.

Szormeny used facts as rivets, not as ballast. They had a clenching force, but were driven in sparingly and, once in, were somewhat difficult to locate.

Subversive forces, said his voice, had been at work, encouraged and, in some cases, directed by agencies outside Hungary. The head of a certain neighbouring state—he would name no names—had seen fit to make public utterances casting aspersions on the heads of the Hungarian Government. That was a sort of mud-slinging match in which he, Szormeny, would not join. For himself, he had no fears. He would submit himself to the only tribunal that mattered—the people of Hungary. All that, however, was the past. Now that the harvest was successfully brought in, it was an appropriate moment to face the future. The latest statistics of trade and industry were highly encouraging . . .

I looked at Lady, who made a guttersnipe gesture.

. . . There had been, the voice went on, a certain amount of quite artificial unrest in the heavy-engineering and transport sections, but it had now been proved beyond a doubt that this was inspired by a pitiful organization of emigré malcontents working from outside the border. Let them but set foot in

[illegible]ary, and the People's Democracy would demonstrate in [illegible]akable fashion what they thought of such activities . .

I tried to visualize the man behind the screen of his words. It was not easy. The words themselves poured out, heavy, smooth, and controlled. But was there something in the tone of voice—something intangible, but nevertheless there—the faint but mocking side tone of a voice which says less than it means?

I felt, as I listened, a prickling premonition of trouble.

". . . To our many well-wishers we would say, Hungary lives, Hungary prospers, Hungary marches forward. To the one or two who wish us ill, we repeat the old Hungarian proverb, 'If you speak ill of a man, be sure that you're out of reach of his arm.' Our arm is not as weak and not as short as some people would appear to imagine. There are occasions on which it could cross the artificial borders of territory and reach the enemies who snap at its heels with imagined impunity . . ."

I happened to glance round at this moment and so caught the look on Lady's face. It was a revelation. Clean gone was the customary sardonic humour. In its place, a flash of—yes—triumph. I was looking at a man, who, after arduous labour, after an infinity of planning, after a lifetime of deception, sees success within his grasp at last.

I have been in a number of unpleasant places in my life, sometimes in the actual face of death, but I cannot remember when I have felt the presence of danger so near. But for a moment only.

Then the other Lady was looking at me again. "You have the appearance," he said, "of a man who is suffering from a stomach-ache. Perhaps you find Szormeny's oratorical style cathartic?"

"I should judge," I said cautiously, "that he is a very practised orator, who says no more and no less than he intends."

"Even his indiscretions, you would say, are calculated?"

"His indiscretions above all."

"You may be right." He turned abruptly to Lisa and Gheorge, and said, "I should like to see the draft of your reports as soon as they are ready. If I fly to The Hague tomorrow, I should like to be able to take them with me."

Lisa and Gheorge nodded like good children, and I went away to find somewhere quiet. I wanted to think.

It was on the following day that I first mentioned to Truë the prospect of paying a visit to Pleasure Island. We were lying, I remember, in the wood behind the castle. My head was on her bare stomach, and her head was on Lippi. My ear being pressed against her midriff, I had the illusion that I could listen right down into the core of her. And, as I spoke the words, at the centre of her mystery something stirred.

"Must we?" she said. "It's much nicer in the woods."

"Much nicer."

"Then why?"

"Just an idea I had. I was thinking about Colin—"

Ping! It was extraordinary. Almost like radar.

"You mean when he disappeared. That he was on Pleasure Island with me."

"With you—not with Mitzi?" Another ping!

"With me," she said.

"Excellent," I said. "I want to make one last effort before I go off home with my tail between my legs. It's just a silly idea I had of trying to accomplish something before I go. I thought that we would copy, as closely as possible, what you did on the evening Colin disappeared. Tell me about it."

"There is almost nothing to tell. It was a gala night. As, indeed, it will be tomorrow—"

"Better still."

"There was a big crowd of people. In the beergarden, listening to the concert. And among the stalls and side-shows. They are nothing, really. Just booths where trinkets are sold."

"What were you doing?"

"Just sitting and listening. The orchestra was playing the finale from *Rosenkavalier*. You know it?"

"Yes. I know it." It appeared we both knew it, so we hummed it in unison.

"That's right. Then Colin said to me, 'Wait here a minute. I'll be back.' And he got to his feet and walked off. That was all."

"In which direction?"

"Out of the beergarden. Towards the booths, I think. It was all very crowded."

"Did anything happen before he left you?"

"What sort of thing?"

"Did anyone speak to him? Did he see anyone? Or say anything?"

"Nothing. We were listening to the music."

"Was he your lover?"

Contact! No doubt about that one. She said yes, and all her breath went out at once. My head went down with it, like the sponge when the bath water runs out.

This time I had enough sense to tell Lady, in advance, what I proposed to do. He was past being surprised at anything.

"I will have you watched, discreetly," he said. "Also, I think, we will warn the frontier posts."

"Yes," I said. I suppose I had long since realized that if he was not dead and buried, Colin must have been taken out of the country.

"I do not think, though, that you will run into that sort of trouble. But you had better keep your eyes open for Messelen's friends. Have you a gun?"

"No."

"You are very wise. A most overrated weapon. However, just for the evening, Gheorge will find you one."

"Do you think I am making a fool of myself?"

Lady opened upon me his most expansive smile and said, "Of

[illegible] you are. But we have a Hungarian proverb: 'You will find the rainbow attached to the tail of the donkey.'"

"That doesn't sound flattering," I said, and went off to look for Gheorge. I found him with Lisa. They were sitting together in the operations room, reading a copy of a report, and looking a lot too pleased with themselves.

"What goes on round here," I said, "that you're all grinning like cats? Has Szormeny had a stroke or something?"

"Not yet," said Gheorge. "But perhaps he will soon."

"He's in for a rough passage," agreed Lisa.

Gheorge seemed to think this terribly funny; I left them giggling together.

At eleven o'clock on the following evening, the finale of *Rosenkavalier* was drawing to its raucous close.

"It is not really a coincidence," explained Truë. "These orchestras have—what do you call it?—a schedule. At the end of the month they come round again to the end of their repertoire."

"And evermore," I said, "go out by that same door wherein they went."

"That is a quotation?"

"A misquotation."

"You are drunk."

"I am. But not with liquor. I am intoxicated with excitement. The night. The music. And you. Every time you lean forward I can see— "

Truë sat up sharply, and said, "You realize that we are under observation?"

"I had noticed the large gentleman at the gate, who followed us in. Yes."

"I thought also that the tall man with the wall-eye seemed interested."

"Where?"

"He has gone now. He was sitting at that table. Do you know him?"

"It is possible," I said carefully, "that he was a character called the Markgraf."

"He did not look very nice."

"His looks do him justice."

The last notes of *Rosenkavalier* sounded. The roll of the side-drum merged into a burst of applause, and I said to Truë, "Think carefully. What next?"

"You say to me, 'Sit still, I won't be a moment,' and you get to your feet, and you push your way to that exit."

"And then?"

"Why, then you go through it."

"Sit still," I said, "I won't be a moment." Her eyes held mine for a second. I could read nothing in them. Hers was not an easy face to read. You needed your ear right up to her stomach to detect what went on inside that girl.

I pushed my way slowly and carefully through the crowd; family groups; no one I had seen before. The exit gave onto a corner of the Island which was full of booths. There was a broad-walk down the middle, which was lined solidly with them. I had never seen them open before. They were not exciting. Some sold sweets and drinks. Others were full of souvenir ashtrays and Stocknägel. Since very few tourists come to Steinbrückl now, I can only suppose that the inhabitants have got into the way of selling them to each other.

I marched down the landward side, conscientiously inspecting each booth. I even purchased a stud-box with a dachshund head on the lid. Nothing sinister happened. So far as I could tell, I was not being followed.

At the end, I turned and made my way along the outer side. These were the booths that backed onto the river bank. Quite the largest of them, in the middle, was a photographer's. On a board in front, it had the usual display of snapshots. Serious German fathers in Tirolean hats. Fat German mothers on rustic seats. Young couples in trompe-l'œil poses behind mermaids and lorelei. And bang in the middle of them all, Colin Studd-Thompson, looking serious but satisfied, and wearing an old Harrovian tie.

It looked so incongruous, it was so unexpected, that I think I stood there for an appreciable time, mouth open, and staring. I knew just what it was. It was a mousetrap, with a bit of cheese in it. All right, cheese was on my diet tonight.

I pushed through the curtain at the entrance of the booth and went in. I was in a sort of porch. A notice said, " Please to be careful that you the outer curtain entirely close before you the inner one open." I pushed through the inner one.

The booth had more depth to it than I had imagined. In the half darkness at my end, a small man was doing something with a camera. In the bright light at the far end, a young man was sitting with a girl on a papier-maché sandcastle, against a background of the Rhine at Bonn.

" A smile, if you please," said the little man. The man and girl smiled. There was a click. More lights came on, and he added, " That will be two marks thirty. You can pay when you collect the prints. In twenty minutes. And what can I do for you, sir? "

" I am interested in a photograph you have in the window."

A blank look replaced the professional smile. " I am afraid they are for display only, sir. Not for sale."

" I did not wish to buy, but I could not help noticing a photograph of a friend of mine. I could point it out to you."

" There is no need. Perhaps if you described it."

" It is quite different from the others. Not a snapshot at all. A portrait photograph of an Englishman. It is in the middle."

" I think I know the one you mean. Yes."

" How did it get there? Is it one of yours? "

He said, " I do not know. Perhaps it has been put there by mistake."

" But surely you could tell me when it was taken. The man is a friend of mine. He has disappeared— "

That, I realized, was a false step. There was no mistaking the look in his eyes now. It was fear.

" I do not know anything about it, sir," he said. " I have many photographs. Some I take myself, but not necessarily all."

I said, " I believe you are lying." But he was not listening to me. I turned my head. Wachs was already through the inner curtain and the Markgraf was close behind him. I had the impression that there were others in the outer lobby.

There was an opening in the curtains behind the studio stage and I went for it, fast. The little photographer made a bleating noise and grabbed at my jacket. It was a half-hearted effort, and I had no difficulty in brushing him aside.

NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

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well known for the suspense and the unusual settings of her many whodunits — "Black Plumes," for instance, and "Tiger in the Smoke" — contributes a thrilling crime story, with an ingenious murder-method.

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ON SALE JUNE 8

The man who was waiting for me beyond the curtain had an easy job, but he put his heart into it. He was an enthusiast. The moment I got through, he hit me with his fist, a tree-felling blow on the bottom of my ribs. I went back through the curtains like a tennis ball that has run into a smash at the net.

I think I should have fallen anyway, but the Markgraf hooked my feet from under me, and the three men then dropped on me. One of them was across my legs. Another held my arms, and the third—the Italian Tino, I think—picked up the photographer's dusty, black satin camera-cover and swathed it carefully round my head.

Through the soft cloth, cruel fingers found my nose and mouth.

In the next few seconds I knew death. The torture of stopped breath. The agony of a pumping, bursting heart. The tearing pain of lungs that screamed for air and were denied; and blackness shot through with red.

Then the cloth was removed, and I lay, my lungs working desperately.

"He's tame," said Wachs, in German. I was rolled onto my side, and my hands were fastened. I was too busy breathing to do much else.

A pair of hands came down towards me. They were holding a bright metal contraption. I flinched as it went into my mouth; then I realized that it was a sort of dentist's gag. It was operated by a thumbscrew. The screw turned. My mouth opened wide.

"Don't break his jaw off," said the Markgraf.

"Why not?" said Wachs. He stopped turning, and got out a dentist's hook. Then he gave my teeth a raking over. He found a loose stopping that seemed to interest him, but there was nothing underneath it, except tooth. He satisfied himself quite thoroughly about that.

"I'd pass him," he said. "Nothing hidden." The metal contraption was removed.

"If you wouldn't mind telling me—" I said.

A great flat palm of a hand came at me carrying a cut strip of adhesive plaster. It flapped across my mouth, pressed down on me. When it went away again my lips were sealed. Quite literally. I waited for the next thing to happen. A tearing noise suggested that some more adhesive tape was being prepared.

"You put it straight over his eyes, and they'll never get it off again without taking his eyelids with it," said Tino critically.

"Not a bad idea," said Wachs. A moment later I was blind as well.

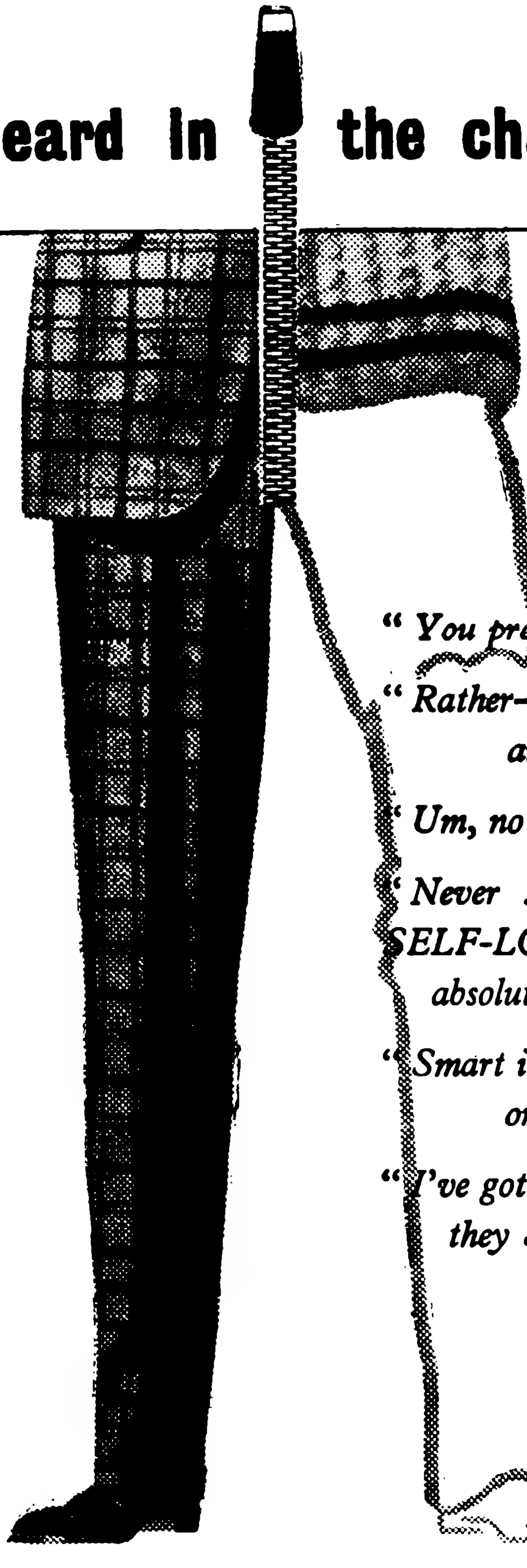
"What about plugging up his nose, as well?"

"You shouldn't do that. They have paid for him—in advance—in good condition."

A foot rolled me over. "He's in prime condition." The same foot kicked me. "Hardly a wriggle out of him, see?"

A new voice said something that I could not understand. It sounded like "net." It felt like a net, too. A fishing-net. I

overheard in the changing rooms



"You prefer zips I see."

"Rather—they keep trousers in good shape and they fasten securely."

"Um, no embarrassing moments, eh?"

"Never . . the SWIFT is a special SELF-LOCKING fly fastener and is absolutely reliable. Just look. . . ."

"Smart idea, that. Must see that they're on all my suits in future."

"I've got 'em on all mine. Not only are they SWIFT, but they're sure!"

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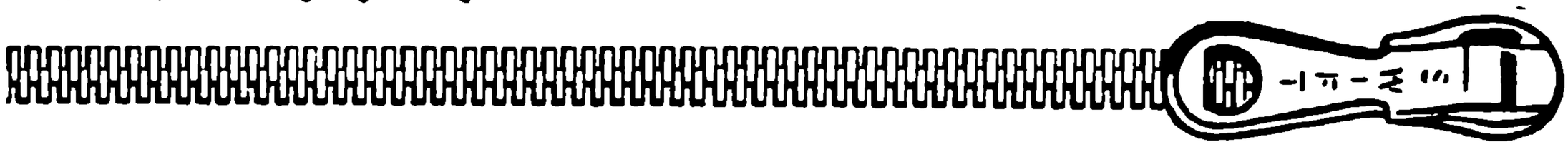

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could smell the tar and feel the cords bite into me as I was lapped in it. Then I was lifted.

As at a great distance I heard a voice say, " See that the way is clear, Karl."

For a moment my mishandled body hung suspended. A salmon in the landing-net. Hooked, gaffed, winded. Near to merciful death.

Then we started to move. I sensed that we were in the open air. It was a very short journey. I was lowered onto boards; boards that yielded under my weight.

The soft sounds of water a few inches from my ears. The puttering of a motor. Everything sounded slow and distant and unactual. As sense departed, I thought of the watches on the gates, of the patrols on the roads, and the guards on the frontier. They were wasting their time. They were ignoring the lessons of geography. They should have grasped two simple facts. That the Raab is joined by the Feistritz. And that, as the Raba, it runs into the Danube.

I must, I think, have been unconscious for the greater part of the next three hours. Perhaps I was at no time quite unaware of what was happening, but there is a numbness of the mind, equivalent to paralysis of the body.

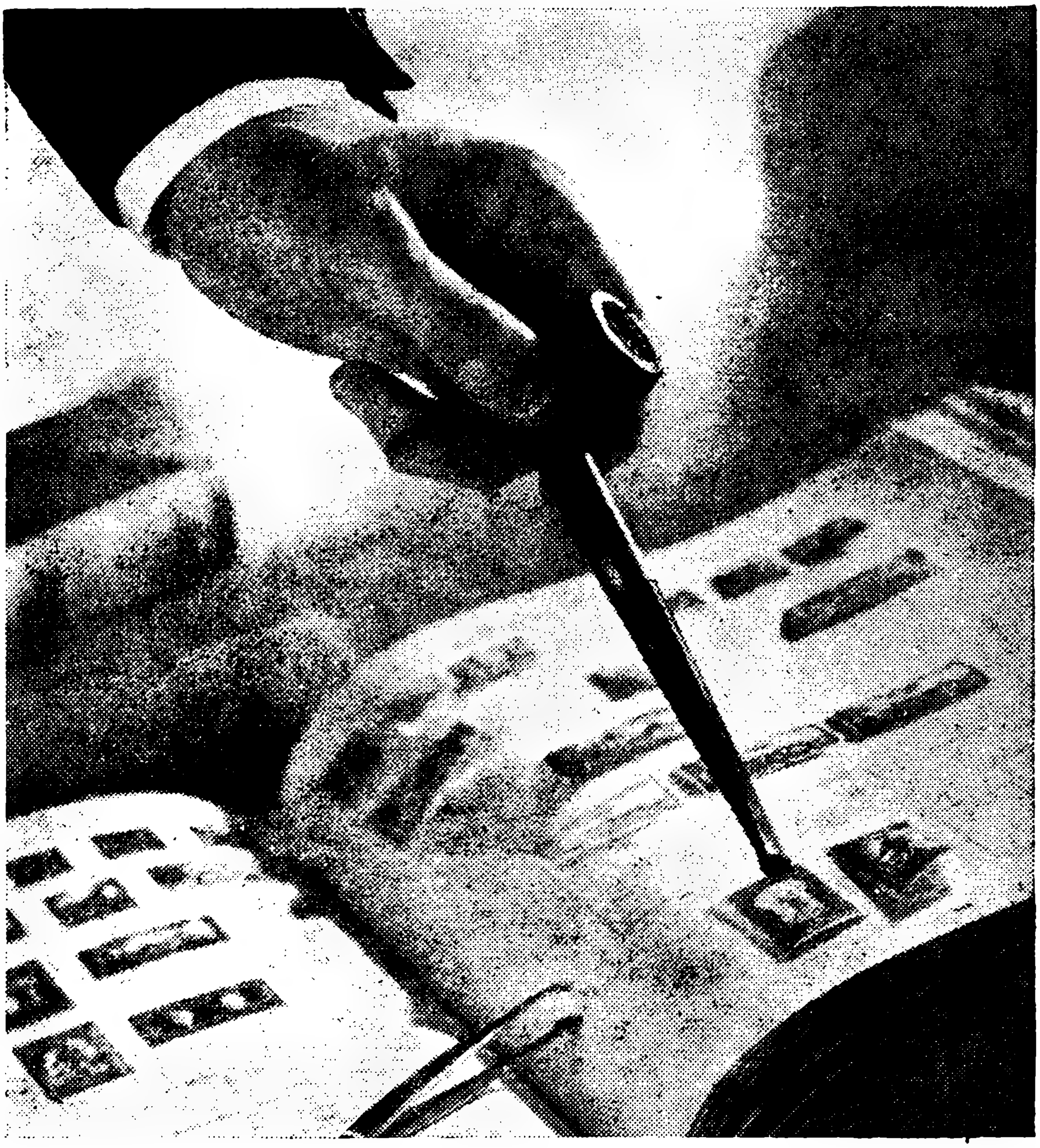
Two impressions only remain of that time. First, I am certain that the boat that I was in pulled up at some sort of jetty; that the motor was switched off, and in the silence voices spoke. There was no alarm in them. They spoke quite softly. And a torch shone on the cocoon of netting in which I lay swathed. How I knew that, with my eyes bandaged, I should be hard put to it to say.

Then there was the moment when I realized that I had changed captors. It was when I felt fingers passing over the netting on my face, and feeling down towards me. Very gently the fingertips came to rest under my jawbone, against the side of my windpipe. I suffered a moment of blind terror. I could feel the pulse in my throat hammering. Then the fingers withdrew and I realized what they were doing. The man squatting over me had not been sure whether I was alive or dead.

After that, I think I slept.

When I woke again, I knew that dawn had come. I could still see nothing, but I could hear the birds tuning up for their morning overture. Everything was very quiet, and there was a feeling of wet white mist in the air. I had woken up just so, many times, on camping holidays on the Broads. Then I heard another sound. A car of some sort was approaching. Not a car—a light truck, or van.

Then hands fumbled under me and I was lifted. Out of the boat onto the landing-stage of planks; rolled over until I was clear of that net and all its knotted, corded, tarry confinement; lifted again into the back of the truck. Two men climbed in with me, the tailboard was slammed into place, and we started off again.



There's something about a pipe

There's something about a pipe which adds immeasurably to a man's leisure hours, and gives him a quiet confidence which is the envy of the bored and the harried. It is a contentment that comes from the savour of a good tobacco, and particularly from Wills's Cut Golden Bar.

'Cut from a bar of gold'

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There are degrees of discomfort, as the prisoner in the dungeon knows. I should not normally have described my position as easy, but freedom from that net, combined with unrestricted, if petrol-smelling air, was luxury; and I think I slept again. So deeply, this time, that I have only the dimmest recollection of the truck stopping and of being raised out of it.

What jerked me back to full consciousness was the strip of plaster being pulled off my eyes. The Markgraf's genial prediction that my eyelids would go with it was not, in fact, fulfilled, but it was a close thing.

I lay, blinking up, blinded for a moment by my own tears.

There was a further jerk as the plaster came off my mouth and then, comparatively painlessly, off my wrists too. I was hoisted up into a sort of wicker chair. My feet remained hobbled.

As I lay there, like a sack, only moving my head quite slowly from side to side, I realized where I was. I had been in many such places before. It was a hiker's shelter-hut, of the sort you find all over the mountains of Central Europe. Not a high-altitude one, or it would have had double windows and a big stove. Just an ordinary forest-walkers' shelter. Usually they were opened only when the snow came.

I heard a noise of crackling sticks, and turned my head again. There were two men in the room, solid men, wearing workmen's overalls, but wearing also, and more unmistakably, the air of heavy authority that is the stamp of officialdom.

So—for better or worse, I was now in the hands of the State.

The immediate change was undoubtedly for the better. The results of their efforts at the fire turned out to be a bowl of hot soup and a pot of thin coffee. I wolfed down the soup with chunks of bread, and swallowed the coffee; and then went to sleep again, but properly this time.

When I woke up, the sun was looking in at the western window, and a second meal was in process of being cooked. I had time to observe, and began to notice things. The first thing that struck me was the confident, unworried bearing of my gaolers. It was evident that we were waiting for dusk before we went on our way, and to that extent secrecy was thought to be desirable. But they weren't worrying about it. Every move they made proclaimed that they were following a well-worn routine. How many other recumbent bodies had polished the wicker chair in which I lay? For how many previous unwilling passengers on this curious underground railway had they heated soup and boiled coffee?

As my will climbed back into control of my body, a less comfortable set of impressions began to assert themselves. The firmness, the consideration, the judicious sympathy. I had observed nurses in charge of a patient who is due for a dangerous operation. I had once, for my pains, to watch over the last twelve hours of a man before he went to the scaffold. I had also seen cattle going to the slaughter-house.

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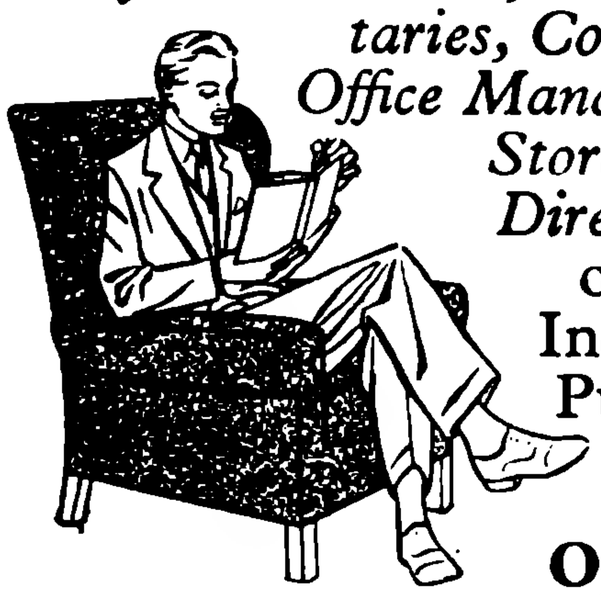

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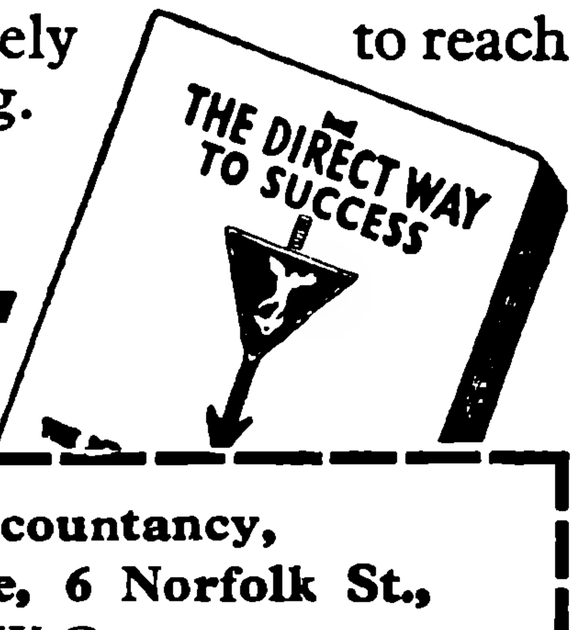

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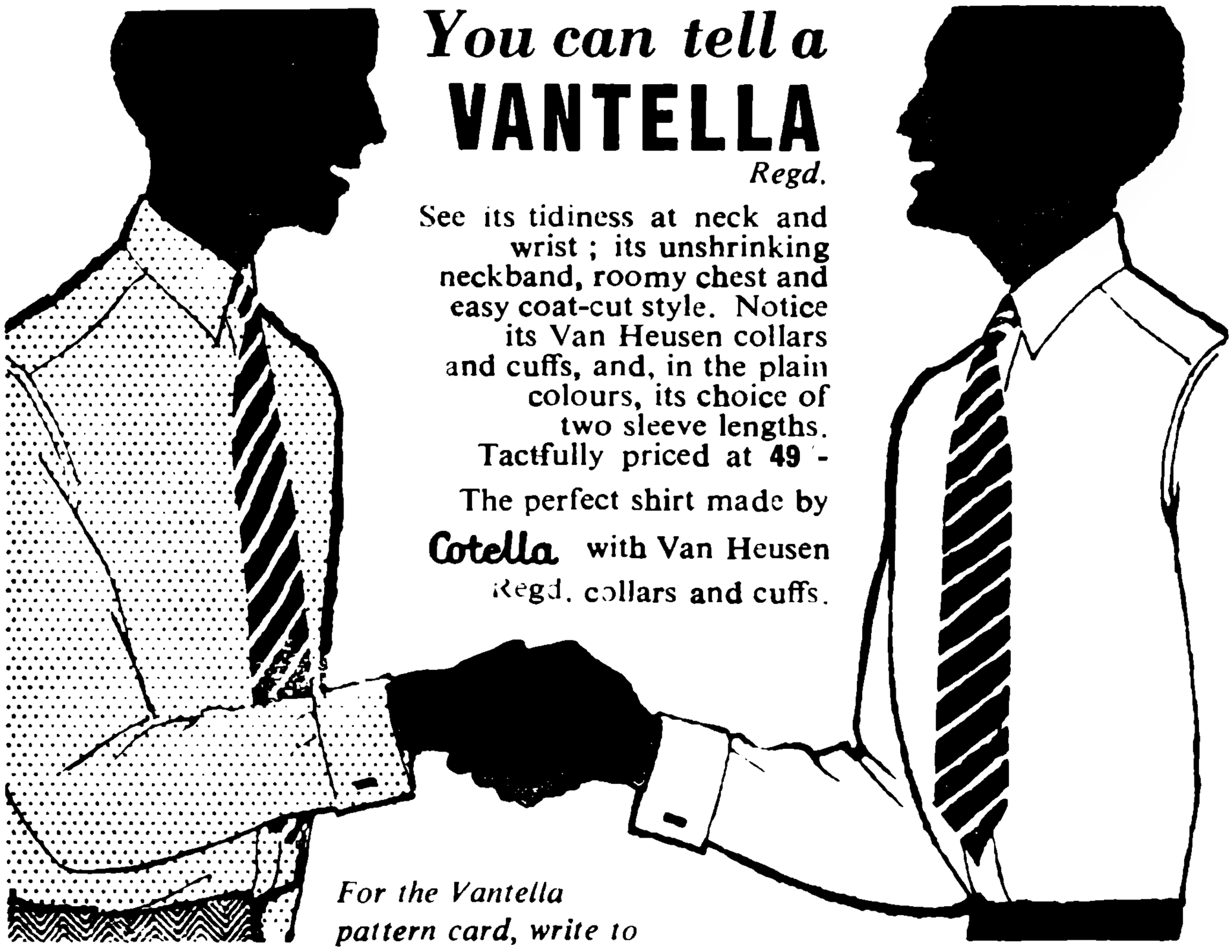

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The plain answer was that nothing would happen. My feet were hobbled. I was lying back in a chair that protested at my every move. There were two very wide-awake gentlemen in the room. And the door, I suspected, was locked.

For our supper we ate half a dozen fried eggs—one of the men must have been out foraging whilst I slept—and drank some wine. When we had finished eating, and everything had been meticulously cleaned, and the fire raked out, and knapsacks repacked, the bigger of the two men, whom I took to be the leader, came over and stood for a moment looking at me. I was his payload. He was weighing me up.

Then he said, in his clipped, provincial Hungarian, that I could understand with an effort, " He looks a lot fresher now."

" So long as he doesn't get too fresh."

The big man produced from his pocket a pair of handcuffs and fastened my hands behind my back with a quick, precise gesture. They were American-type handcuffs, which get tighter if you struggle. I didn't struggle. Then he cut the rope hobble off my feet and said, in his best English, " Now, we go."

It was, I imagine, the same vehicle that had brought me; the small canvas-backed type of lorry that you see in hundreds on the roads of Europe. The driver was already in his seat. The two guards manhandled me up into the back and we started off.

They took it in turns to watch me. One would sit on the edge of the seat, his eyes on me. The other would relax and smoke. After ten minutes they changed roles. It was as professional as that. When I was certain that I had no chance of escape, I concentrated on trying to make out my whereabouts. The back of the tilt was up, and I could see the stars. As soon as I had placed Orion I knew where I was. We were going almost due north, with a touch of east in it.

This gave me food for thought. If, as I surmised, my entry into Hungary had been via the junction of the Raab and the Feistritz, and I was now travelling north, this should bring me roughly to a place north-east of where I had started from, but on the Hungarian side of the frontier.

At one point the road looped so that, for a moment, we were travelling almost south and I glimpsed the Plough and the Pole Star. I saw something else as well. It was the characteristic peak of the Radkersburg, the same that I had pointed out to the Baronin from her conservatory window. I was right, then. The place we were making for was not very far on the Hungarian side of the Austrian border. I thought of Schloss Obersteinbrückl, standing sentinel the other side of the mountains. It seemed very distant, in time and in place. As though at the reverse end of a huge telescope, I saw the pigmy, gesticulating figures of Gheorge and Lisa and the General and Truë and Ferenc Lady. Lady, I am sure, was smiling.

The tyres hummed and the white road unrolled behind me like the used film off a spool. My head nodded down onto my shirt,

rose with a start, and sank again. It was the slowing of the vehicle that jerked me back into the present. We were turning off the road into a gateway. There was a murmur of words, and we went on, still slowly, and climbing. Then we stopped altogether.

Both my guards were very much on the alert now. Headquarters, I guessed.

Came the sound of a heavy door opening. We backed, made a half turn, and ran under an archway into a courtyard. The same heavy door was shut. My guards relaxed. Their job was over. The mouse was in the trap.

One of them fumbled at my wrists, and the handcuffs came off. I climbed out awkwardly.

The size of the courtyard suggested that it was a very large house indeed. Something of the type of those monstrous German Spa hotels, which we copied from them and erected, in the early years of the last century, to the desecration of our countryside. A big heavy, functional, soulless lump of brick and slate. The middle-class villa inflated to a castle.

As soon as I got inside I knew that I was in a police headquarters. From start to finish I hardly saw anyone in it wearing uniform, but when you've been in one or two you get to know them by the smell. I was signed for in a book—" accepted unexamined, without prejudice to damage discovered subsequently "—and my original guards disappeared, still unsmiling and unmoved. I wondered what sort of lives they led off duty. I was invited to sit down, and I sat and waited. For a long time. One man sat at a desk, copying entries from one book into another. A second man sat by the door. He had nothing to do. A clock ticked.

Quietly, in the distance, a bell trilled.

The man by the door came out of his chair as smartly as if a sergeant-major had shouted at him, and seized my arm. Another man appeared from nowhere. I was hustled down a long passage. There was a door at the end of the passage which said *Colonel Dru.* This was opened and I was pushed inside.

It was a huge room, something between a study and an office. There were two smallish desks, behind each of which sat a serious-looking young man. And a very large desk indeed, which was unoccupied. The owner of this desk was filling out a leather armchair beside the open fire.

Colonel Dru, I supposed. He was the perfect pig-man. So perfect that you looked round for the make-up. But no. On closer inspection you could see that this was something that Nature had conceived, thought out, and executed without assistance. The skin pink but tough enough to turn a carving-knife, the bristle of hair, the overflowing jowl, the little tusks of teeth, and the tiny deep-set, twinkling, vicious eyes.

" Offer our friend a chair," said Dru, " and stay if you wish."

This increased the audience to four.

I got the impression that the Colonel was a man who liked an audience when he performed.

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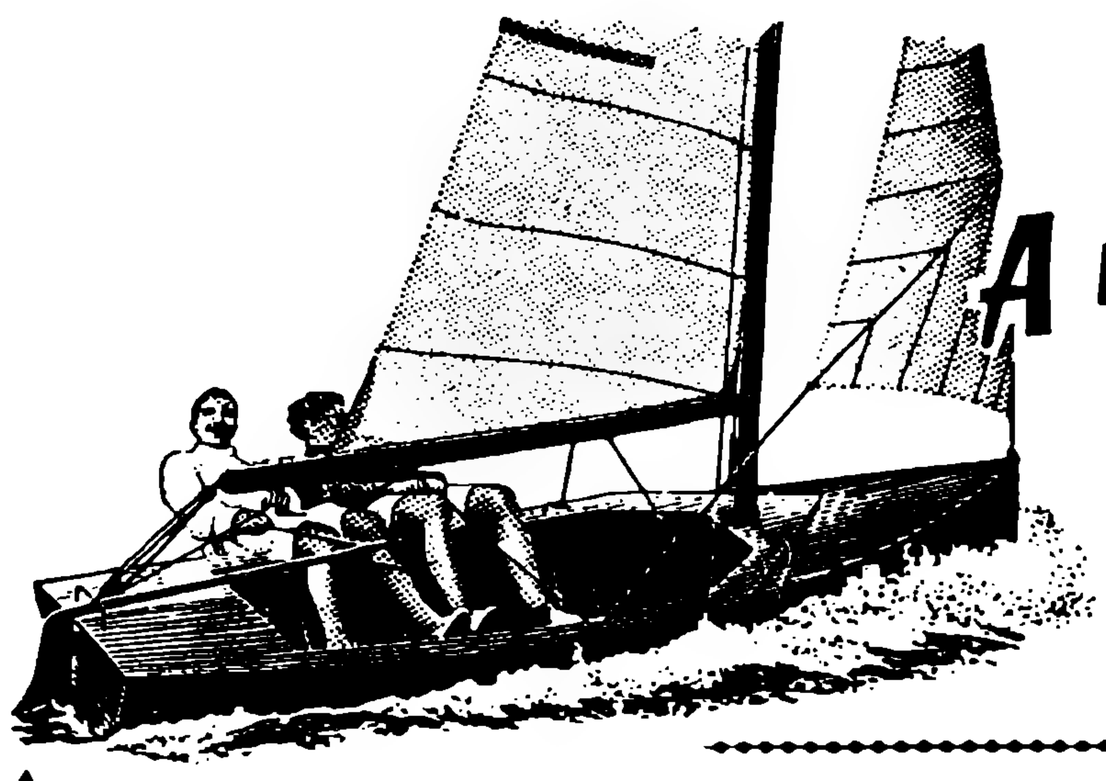

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" I must protest," I said, " against this treatment of a British subject."

" But of course." Dru swivelled round in his chair, placed his elbows on the arm, and his chin on his hands, like some parody of a benevolent judge. " Make your protest."

" I have made it."

" But is that all? "

" I have nothing more to say."

Dru closed his eyes, opened them again, and stared at each of his four assistants in turn. They tittered. I sat back in my chair and determined that, come what may, I would keep my temper.

" Really, now, Mr. Cowhorn— "

I must have looked puzzled.

" I have your pronunciation? "

" Oh, you were trying to pronounce my name. Well, I suppose that's not bad for a first shot."

" I was saying, Mr. Cowhorn. Why have you put yourself into this business? It is not your business. Why do you intrude in it? "

" It would take a long time to explain."

" We have the night in front of us."

" I've been looking for a friend of mine."

" Admirable. But of course. His name? "

" His name is Studd-Thompson."

" And you came here expecting to find him? "

" I didn't come here at all. I was brought."

" But that name. Do I not remember him? A moment."

The Colonel held up one finger, as if he was listening for the first cuckoo. His aides gaped. Turning on them, he shouted, " Studd-Thompson. Search. Search. In the cabinets. He may be here."

They leapt to their feet, hauled open a filing-cabinet each, and began thumbing through folders. " Quicker. He may escape. Some search under S. Others under T. Leave no stone unturned. But no. There is nothing."

The Colonel sank back in his chair. He waved the others back to their seats. " It is no use. He has escaped us."

I said coldly, " If you have any serious questions to ask, perhaps you would be good enough to ask them."

" But of course I am serious. I have asked you a question. Why do you interfere in this business? Our countries are not at war. We are friends."

" Great big friends."

" Exactly. All friends together. Then why do you violate our friendship? "

" I have done nothing— "

" Co-operation. That is what we ask. If we are friends, we co-operate. If we co-operate, then there is no trouble. Am I stupid? " He shot me a sharp look from his sharp little eyes. It was almost a nudge in the ribs.

" Oh yes," I said. " I mean, certainly not."

" Then that is what you should tell them at the castle. How are all the dear fellows, by the way—the General, and Gheorge? "

" They were all very well when I left them."

" Fine, fine. And Lisa? And Truë? "

" Fine," I said. " Fine."

" And Herr Lady? "

" Well, of course, I didn't see a great deal of him," I said cautiously.

" A great man," said Dru. " But he might have been greater still. Perhaps the greatest in all Hungary."

I was surprised to detect a note of what sounded like genuine respect. " I had no idea," I said.

" He did not tell you? But certainly. For a year or two after the war, his star was in the ascendant. There was nothing he might not have achieved. Then he made one mistake. But one was enough."

" And what was that? "

" He refused to sleep with the Minister of Transport."

The bellow of laughter which greeted this was like a sudden attack by the wind-instruments. I looked round. The orchestra had increased to six, an old man and a thick, black-haired, unfriendly character in the uniform of a major.

" She was, perhaps, past her first youth. But not unattractive. Imagine it. Throwing away a cabinet post from mere fastidiousness. Eh, Becker? "

Major Becker agreed that he would sleep with the rear portion of a pantomime elephant if it would advance him professionally. The Colonel plainly regarded this as an attempt to steal his audience, and quelled the laughter with a frown.

" You see," he said to me, " we are frank with you. Why not be frank with us? "

" I hardly see what I can tell you. You know so much already. I presume that someone at Schloss Obersteinbrückl is your informant."

" Of course."

" Which one? "

" You do not know? "

" No," I said, " I've no idea."

" Incredible. Quite incredible." The conductor toyed with his baton for a moment whilst the orchestra watched him, starry-eyed. " No doubt, from time to time, Lady informed you of his plans? "

" He told me practically nothing. And much of what he did tell me was, I suspect, untrue."

" At first, no doubt. But later on he confided in you? "

" No. Why should he? "

" Even after you had removed Major Messelen for him? "

A very faint twittering from the strings. I tried to keep my head. " Who says I murdered Messelen? "

" My information is that you strangled him with your hands and then buried him."

Major Becker said something, and Dru bounced round on him. "You do not believe he could do it? That is because you cannot judge the finer points of a man. You would like a demonstration?"

Apparently everyone wanted a demonstration.

"Come here, then, Major."

Becker got to his feet and I had a chance to examine him more closely. He was biggish and white and had a lot of black hair, some of it on the back of his hands. He smelt of flowers. I liked none of him.

"And you."

I got up.

"Now, Major, you have strong hands and wrists? Yes. Good. Now see if you can break his grip."

We held out our hands and stood there, for a moment, like embarrassed contestants who have been forced to make up their quarrel in public. Dru beamed at us.

Becker put on the pressure. He was strong but not exceptionally so. If you hold your hand in the right way an opponent can do you no harm by hard gripping. He wastes his strength. At the end of a minute I felt his pressure weakening, and sharply increased mine. Becker winced. I tightened again. He gave a little grunt, and we broke away.

Dru glanced round the room and collected the applause. I had no attention to spare. I was trying to remember something. *Just how many people had I told that I had strangled Messelen?* Lady,

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of course. And possibly one other—certainly no more. It looked as if the field was thinning out as we got nearer to the post.

"And now that we have all had our fun, perhaps you will answer a few very simple questions?"

"You still haven't explained," I said desperately, "by what right—"

"Have you any rights? Has a murderer any rights? Is he not outside the law?"

It was a nice point. But I suddenly felt tired of it all. "What do you want?"

"Information."

"According to you, I have no information. You know everything already. Far more than I do."

"Not everything. And corroboration is always useful."

"And what makes you think I shall tell you anything?"

There was a pause of pained surprise.

"But *of course* you will tell me," said Colonel Dru. "When I ask for information, I obtain it. Do I ever fail?" He glanced round. There now seemed to be nine people in the room. "No, Colonel," they said. "You never fail."

"Are not my successes well known?"

About half of them said, "Well known," and the other half, "Yes, indeed." At a less solemn moment I might have found the folk-song effect entertaining. As it was, I could only say, with a dry mouth, "Go on."

"I expect," said Dru courteously, "that it is ignorance that is at the back of your refusal. It is often so. You do not understand modern methods. You are thinking of the Spanish Inquisition. Yes? And dungeons and racks?" Titter from the first violins. Nothing from me. "And of ingenious Chinese gentlemen who tie their victims beneath a single drop of water which falls upon their foreheads until they go mad. Ha, ha."

"Ha, ha," said the wind-instruments obediently.

"Put such ideas out of your head. They are old-fashioned. Too slow. Too uncertain. *Too complicated.* They give the victim too much time to be sorry for himself. Once let a man be sorry for himself and he becomes a martyr. A resistance is built up. You see, I am quite frank with you."

Although the Colonel retained his academic manner perfectly, his audience was not so restrained. Some of the younger ones were beginning to dribble already.

"What we aim at nowadays is simplicity, speed, and certainty. Have you ever considered how a performing dog is trained? A hoop is placed in front of him. He does not move. He is touched with a red-hot iron. He moves through the hoop. A second time. The same thing. Perhaps a third time, too. After all, dogs are not as intelligent as human beings. After that there is no trouble at all. When he sees a hoop, he jumps through it. If he does not, he *knows* he will be burnt. It is as simple as that."

I managed a yawn.

The Colonel said, " Quite right. I must not let my enthusiasms run away with me. Now to your case. I think of a question. Something quite simple. What shall it be? Something simple enough to be answered by yes or no. Let me see. We will take this question: is it Lady's intention to provoke a General Strike? "

I hope I preserved my composure. If the roof had fallen on me I could hardly have been more shocked. I was aware that a cold, piggy eye was gleaming at me.

" All right," I said. " You ask me a question."

" I then give you ten seconds. If you do not answer me in ten seconds, I will boil off your right hand."

" You will what? "

" Place it in a saucepan of water and bring it to the boil."

" You— "

" But remember. The essence of this is certainty. You will have only ten seconds to answer, and to answer quite truthfully. After that time, nothing that you say or do will have any effect at all; until the treatment is complete. Then we can start again."

" But— "

" *Is it Lady's intention to provoke a General Strike?* "

There was a clock on the wall with a big second-hand. I watched it up to eight. For an agonizing moment, I thought I had miscounted . . .

★***The Fourth (and last) Part of " Be Shot For Sixpence," by Michael Gilbert, appears in next month's Argosy on sale June 8.***

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to POTTLE DEEP
on page 98

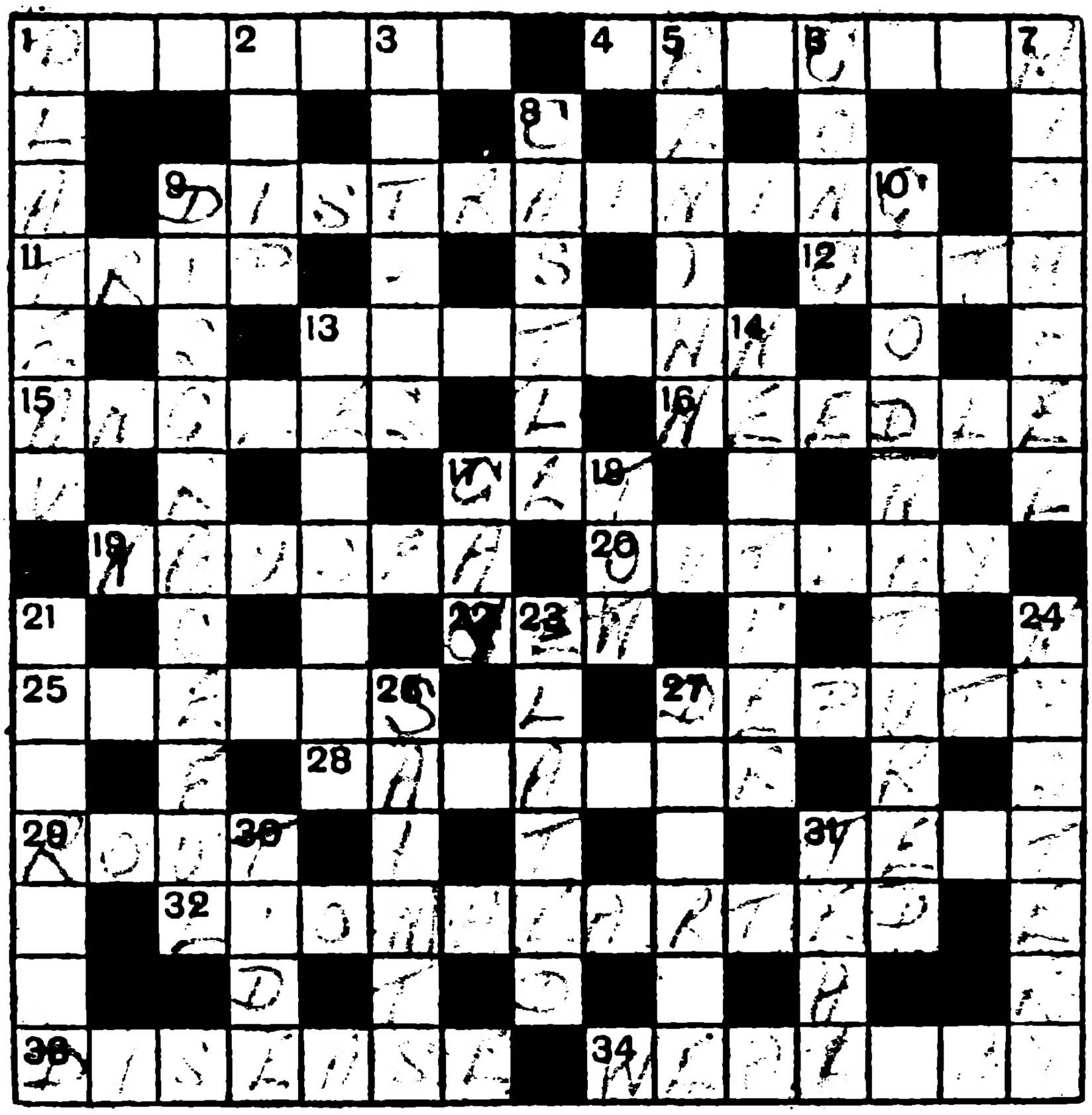
1. *One star means that the brandy is not more than three years old; two stars, four years old, three stars, five years old or more*
2. *Nothing to do with brandy or wine. It's a river near Philadelphia, U.S.A., which gave its name to a battle in the American War of Independence*
3. *Tea*
4. *A doch-an-doris is a stirrup cup for the* parting *guest*
5. *a. Alice b. Socrates c. Gladstone d. the Pobble*
6. *No. Grog is rum and water mixed. Admiral Vernon, known because of his grogram trousers as Old Grog, was the first officer to order three parts of water to be added to the rum ration*
7. *a. rum b. gin and vermouth c. equal parts of fresh lemon juice, Cointreau, and brandy d. wine*
8. *Hotel-keeper's charge for serving wine not supplied by himself*

ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 22

★



CLUES

Across

1 Not so good as example (7).

4 Young Mormon (7).

9 Diana's preparation for the bailiff's job (11).

11 Expedition might be a come-down (4).

12 Visi-bility nil, he's an uncultured oaf (4).

13 Where to go bald-headed (7).

15 Doesn't imply that our ancestors weren't straight (6).

16 Seldom found in a haystack (6).

17 —— cracking! (3).

19 Mixed-up Una suffers from it at sea (6).

20 Expenditure (6).

22 Used for bows but not for buttons (3).

25 In the best-known towns of Greece (6).

27 Acts for another (6).

28 Kipling's hound hero to Boots (7).

29 This old party won't do for the army (4).

31 One is absorbed in it (4).

32 Richard I was (4-7).

33 Seaside change for this ailment (7).

34 They mix with the law to become rich (7).

Down

1 French dish with water forms the high spot (7).

2 Was main Australian export to England (4).

3 Language of the locals (6).

5 " John Gilpin was a citizen of credit and —— " (Cowper) (6).

6 Going without me (4).

7 His day's a daisy (7).

8 Alias rook (6).

9 Scandalous (11).

10 Godot unread gives a confused impression of kindliness (4-7).

13 He may give you a run for your money (7).

14 Not one or the other (7).

17 Jolly author of the *Beggar's Opera* (3).

18 Pull with hemp (3).

21 " —— urn or animated bust " (Gray) (7).

23 In high spirits (6).

24 Secret rite or early play (7).

26 Satins like this are holy (6).

27 Stage on the road to learning (6).

30 A great sea power (4).

31 Duck disturbed (4).

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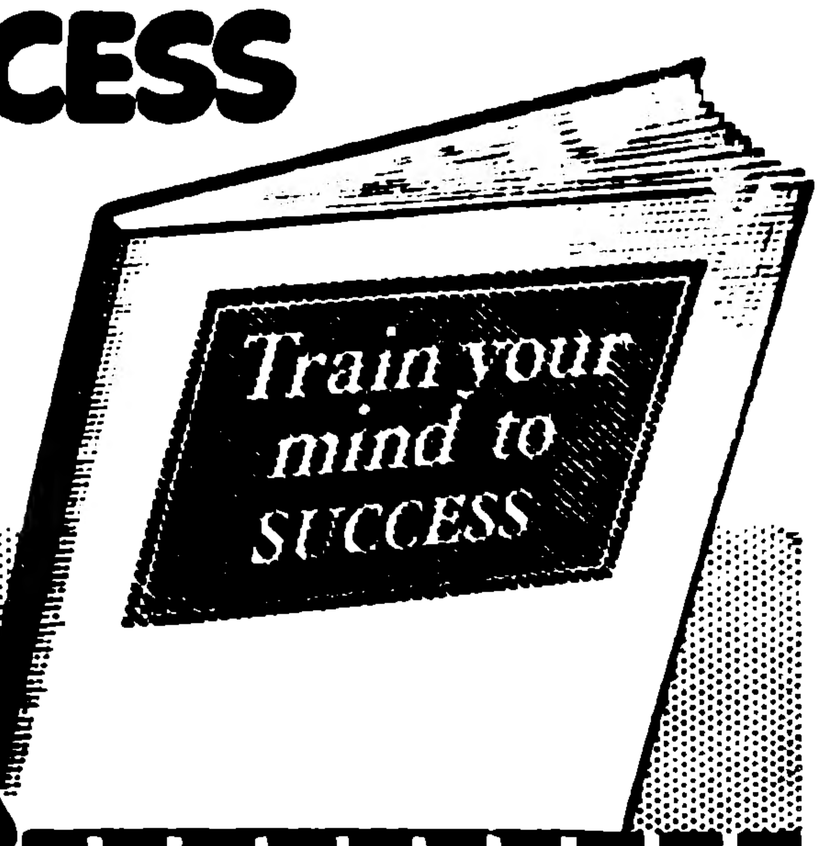

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(A stamp for reply appreciated but not essential)

PRACTICAL RESULTS

Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it. . . *Student* 778/2119: I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student* 1954/157: I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**: they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme - fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY-MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.